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Not in Any Textbook: Contextualizing Learning for Elementary Students Using
Experiential Simulations

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Alicia Jane McKinney

November 2014

Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how the AmeriTowne program supported learning and incorporated 21st century knowledge and skills development for fifth graders through the use of an experiential simulation. Relatively few studies examine simulated learning generally, and this study provides insight into AmeriTowne's unique approach by describing, interpreting, and appraising the intentions, operations, and benefits of the program's Day in Towne simulation.

Five questions guided this study. (1) What are the intentions of the Young AmeriTowne program? (2) What conditions does the Young AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation provide for educational experience? (3) Which aspects of the AmeriTowne's Day in Towne simulation facilitate students developing and utilizing 21st Century knowledge and skills? (5) How are AmeriTowne's theories and practices applicable in K-12 classrooms across the nation?

This study utilized Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism and provides detailed descriptions and interpretations taken from one site. It includes the experiences of fourteen groups of fifth graders from Denver metropolitan area public schools. Data collection included direct observations, interviews, document analysis, and artifact review.

Findings emerged that reveal: (1) The physical environment was critical in the students' learning, bridging the curriculum, pedagogy, and aesthetic elements provided by the simulation and supporting constructivism. (2) Seven themes were distilled from the research. These themes include: physical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic, creative, schematic, and altruistic elements. (3) Findings underscore the importance of social learning and context in relation to skill development, and application.

This study has a variety of implications within the field of education that impact teacher education programs, practicing teachers, school administration, and school reform efforts particularly in relation to considering what students will need in to be prepared for endeavors including postsecondary schooling, and entrance into the workforce.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of education's chief roles is to prepare future workers and citizens to deal with the challenges of their times. Knowledge work can be done anywhere by anyone who has the expertise, a cell phone, a laptop, and an Internet connection. But to have expert *workers*, every country needs an education system that produces them; therefore, education becomes the key to economic survival in the 21st century.
— Trilling & Fadel (2009, p.6)

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today's students will have 10 to 14 jobs by the age of 38. Thirty or forty years ago, we knew the kinds of jobs our students would have. Today, we are preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist (*The Denver Post*, 2007). Among the challenges faced by today's teachers is how to prepare students in a rapidly changing world, enabling them with the knowledge and skills that will allow them the greatest potential for future success. Dede (2009) defines success in terms of students possessing the knowledge and skills needed for full participation in the 21st century as workers and citizens. Several years ago, hundreds of executives from major corporations were surveyed about graduates in regard to being workforce ready (Conference Board, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006). The study clearly showed that many of those entering the workforce lacked not only basic academic skills but also applied skills such as oral and written communication, critical thinking and problem solving, as well as the ability to work within diverse teams collaboratively and to show leadership skills. Therefore, it stands to reason that in order for students to be prepared to

enter the workforce and to take their place as global citizens, schools must consider helping to develop these skills within students in order to ready them for life outside of the classroom (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006; Friedman, 2007; Dede, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010).

While traditional state standards are designed to answer the question of *what* our students should be learning (the content knowledge) in order to be successful in the 21st century, both scholars and business leaders alike believe that more emphasis needs to be placed on what students should be able to *do* with this content (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Outside of the educational realm, some in the business world have called for schools to consider changes to learning that would better suit work in a post-secondary world. One such group is the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). Founded in 2004, P21 is a national organization that advocates for 21st century readiness for every student. P21's mission is "to serve as a catalyst to position 21st century readiness at the center of US K-12 education by building collaborative partnerships among education, business, community, and government leaders" (P21, 2014). Twenty-first century readiness can be defined as "the essential proficiencies students need to ensure adequate preparation for college and career" (P21, 2006).

P21 has created a framework that presents a holistic view of 21st century teaching and learning that combines a discrete focus on 21st century student outcomes (a blending of specific skills, content knowledge, expertise, and literacies) with support systems to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st century and beyond. Twenty-first century skills are described according to the parameters

established by P21 who currently supports these as a gateway to careers, including those that may not yet exist. P21 has outlined the following competencies as necessary for future success outside of schooling:

- Information and communication skills
- Thinking and problem-solving skills (critical thinking and systems thinking; problem identification, formulation and solution; creativity and intellectual curiosity)
- Interpersonal and self-direction skills (accountability and adaptability; social responsibility)
- Global awareness
- Financial, economic and business literacy, as well as entrepreneurial skills to enhance workplace productivity and career options
- Civic literacy

The aforementioned 21st century skills go beyond fact driven learning and encourage students to develop communication, innovation, observational skills, analytic reasoning, and overall adaptability (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

P21 believes that students of this generation need classroom delivery of their educational curriculum to be changed to match the skills they will be asked bring with them in future endeavours to include citizenry and post-secondary schooling, as well as entrance into the workforce. Among the goals of the 21st century initiatives are to fundamentally restructure classroom learning experiences by exposing students to more authentic activities that allow for collaborative inquiry rather than teaching skills and

standards in the absence of application and context (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Huber & Breen, 2007; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Background of the Problem

Despite the considerable work that has been done to raise academic expectations, implement standards and assessments, and increase accountability, our educational system in the United States is still primarily a 20th century system, and in many ways, we are still preparing students for a world that no longer exists (Karoly & Panis, 2004; P21, 2006; Dede, 2009). The demands of the 21st century learners require us to examine our schools, our expectations, and the priorities for student learning (Castronova, 2000; Paris & Winograd, 2006; Trilling & Fadel 2009; Rotherham & Willingham, 2010). No longer is it enough to have classrooms that are teacher-centered with disseminating fragmented curriculum and students working in isolation memorizing facts (Dede, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Marzano & Heflebower, 2012; Taylor & Fratto, 2012). In order to better prepare students for the ever-changing world, educators must address learning via the connection of content and context through instructional practices that lend themselves to developing interpersonal skills students can use for life and work (Crebbin, 2004; Friedman, 2007; Kapur, 2007; Lombardi, 2007; Dede, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Therefore, the de-contextualized, fragmented model of teaching and learning often presented to today's students is rapidly becoming obsolete as it stands in direct contrast to the authentic, interdisciplinary approach that helps students understand the nature of the real-world application, which in contrast positions learning in a meaningful context (Pritchard, 2008). Too often, learning is stripped of this contextual

relevance and learners are required to acquire facts and rules that have no direct significance or meaning to them because they are not related to anything the learner is interested in or needs to know (Paris & Winograd, 2006). Teachers in the current school system are confronted daily by students questioning the worth of instruction and wondering when they will use it in their future (Rotherham & Willingham, 2010). This demonstrates the distinction between useful knowledge and unnecessary facts and goes beyond merely a perceived disconnect by students to a reality where time is spent in class on material that will not be useful or needed beyond that lesson or textbook chapter test (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Likewise, information has often been presented in a way that is incongruent to its use in life (Anderson et al., 1996) creating a view of such information (as acquired in many traditional school models) as useless and lacking of meaning altogether. Conversely, useful knowledge can be thought of as that which can be transferred to and used in new situations (Duffy et al., 2004). By allowing students the opportunity to engage in experiences that are contextualized, dynamic, and relevant, students utilize skills and knowledge spontaneously and employ meaningful problem solving (Duffy et al., 2004). Wagner (2008) suggests that the divide between what schools are currently teaching and what is required for future societal participation has created a global achievement gap that if not addressed will leave students underprepared.

Rationale for the Study

Despite the need for change, many schools continue to struggle in deciding which approach to use in designing curriculum that will meet the needs of 21st century learners (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Piirto, 2011; Marzano & Heflebower,

2012). The current 21st century educational movement calls for schools to address the present and future needs of today's learners through content and skills integration, however, more information is needed on exactly *how* to best incorporate this meaningfully in educational settings. 21st century learners may be working in environments that are more fluid in nature, and may be asked increasingly to work with others; therefore, it may be useful to research alternative educational settings and those that employ socially-based learning (Friedman, 2007; Wagner, 2008). Additionally, new understandings of learning in experiential educational settings can guide educators in designing future learning programs for students. One way to find out more about this is to consider current learning theories and to look at existing programs that can support 21st century skills integration and development in authentic ways. The literature has shown that students learn when they are able to utilize experience to make meaning (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Kumar, 2006; Lombardi, 2007) and that contextual and social aspects are important in learning and skill development. More research is still needed to demonstrate what this might look like for our nation's students. Although many experts agree that meaningful learning for students is linked to experience (Dewey, 1938; Richmond, 1973; Kolb, 1984; Bruner, 1990; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) more research is needed to expand our current understanding of how students learn through experience. Experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning, and many theorists believe that the use of reflection and dialogue with others based on each new experience effectively leads to "meaning-making" and new knowledge (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991) particularly when learning is context-based or situated. Additionally,

experiential and situated learning could support goals put forth by proponents of 21st century learning. Currently there is a dearth of information on 21st century learning for younger students. Whereas several recent dissertation studies have looked at organizations/schools or adult staffs addressing 21st century learning (Hillman, 2012; Oretta, 2012; Velez, 2012), this study looks specifically at elementary-aged students developing and using skills important for the 21st century.

Some of the most effective learning contexts for meeting this are those which immerse the learners in the situation requiring him or her to use previous skills and to acquire new ones in order to succeed in the situation (Duffy et al., 2004). Resnick (1978) suggests that one consequence of traditional school instruction is that it holds no resemblance to performances where the same information/material would be utilized outside of school. She found that situations where learning is most often applied, such as practical situations or those found within work environments, differ significantly from approaches taught through instructional models inside of schools. As a result, Resnick (1987) and Lave & Wenger (1991) suggest a theory of *situated learning* that studies and employs learning situations that are congruent with real world settings of performance. They theorize that learning is embedded in situations permitting social interactions and advancing personal knowledge construction, as well as those that give opportunities for knowledge application and problem solving. In it is believed that powerful learning situations can be found within experiences and environments that allow students to spontaneously make sense of the situation and which intuitively suggest appropriate actions and interactions thereby supporting the emergence of skills through processing

and meaning-making (Van Oers, 1998). Situated learning can be viewed as a way to support learning for elementary students. The question remains how best might we situate learning for elementary-aged students?

A method of providing a situated learning opportunity to young students is through the use of simulations. In simulation-based learning—using an artificial environment based off a real-life concept (Aldrich, 2004; Gredler, 2004)—students are given the opportunity to interact with the environment and others to develop, practice, and apply a complex set of skills or concepts in an authentic way (Bicknell-Holmes & Hoffman, 2000). Among the benefits to students learning in a simulation rather than a real life situation is that time and/or the environment can be manipulated to guide discovery and risk-taking because the impact of failing within a simulation is minimal while the potential for learning remains high (Castranova, 2000). When situating learning for students using simulations, skills, and knowledge become interdependent with their use and possessing a base of knowledge is necessary to the acquisition not only of more knowledge but also of new skills. Skills can neither be taught nor applied effectively without prior knowledge of a wide array of subjects and often more importantly students do not relate to them without a meaningful purpose for application (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978), and a simulation can provide this.

Situated learning through simulations engages students in meaningful problem solving contexts facilitating sustained exploration by students, enabling them to understand the kinds of problems and opportunities that could occur in the real world (Duffy et al., 1991). Early exposure to such ideas at the elementary level is often referred

to as life and career education, which is one way for young students to begin thinking toward their post-secondary future (Katzman, 1995). Developing academic and employability skills represents a major component of education for 21st century students (P21, 2006; Dede, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). Career education (the developmental process through which students are led to connect education with lifelong work) supports and advances basic, academic, and employability skills, career exploration, and decision-making (Katzman, 1995). At the elementary school level, this developmental process generally begins with career awareness, which is initiated to broaden student knowledge about careers and connect academic learning to the workplace. It establishes school as a foundation for education and workplace connections and requires community involvement and support (Oklahoma School-to-Work System, 1996). The elementary grades therefore offer an opportune time to integrate academic and career related skills into the school curriculum (Bouchillon, 1996) situating the learning. For example, activities can be introduced to help students become aware of how workers use basic skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, along with mathematics and science to perform their jobs. Coupled with these, problem-solving activities can be used to help students develop thinking skills such as creativity, decision making, visualization, reflection, and reasoning. Collaborative activities can help to build personal qualities such as leadership, responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity (Brown, 1999). New ways of considering learning for our 21st century students now includes the development of such competences and the ability to manage existing and future challenges in life or work (Illeris, 2009).

As previously stated, situated learning requires a real-world context and also includes other social participants in the learner experience (Heeter, 2005). Here the continuum of previous, present, and future learning, along with the learning of others, all figure prominently in the development of the learner. In this model, learning occurs socially among participants and emphasizes the idea that all learning takes place in a context. This is where content, skills, and context become intertwined.

While situated learning acknowledges that there must be a link between school learning and real life application, creating an environment where students see the connection between school learning and the real world often remains a challenge for elementary school teachers. New ways of considering teaching and learning would place learning in an authentic environment and draw upon contributions from parents, businesses, industry, and community and connect school to life. Such student-centered teaching practices would engage students in experiences that are real and of interest to them therefore adding relevance to their personal life (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978). By placing academics in the context of real life happenings and involving students in the process of solving unstructured problems, it engages them in complex, creative, higher-order thinking about issues that are relevant to the world in which they live. One reasonable way for younger students to gain access to authentic experiences is by introducing students to the institutions that resemble society either through real-world experiences outside of the school or the creation of a smaller scale replication (simulation) that if constructed properly would allow such experience to inform the young about the institutions they will enter as adults (Richmond, 1973). The addition of

21st century knowledge and skills integrated with experiential opportunities to utilize such skills can push the boundaries of education beyond the traditional classroom, help students develop dynamic problem solving skills which can be used to tackle a variety of subject matter, and aid in future success (Drake & Burns, 2004). Young AmeriTowne is one program that allows young students access to the authentic experience of the work world, and the Young AmeriTowne site was used to gather data for the purpose of this study.

The Young AmeriTowne Program

The Young AmeriTowne Program (hereafter this will be referred to as AmeriTowne) is a unique, educational program offered locally to fifth grade students to learn about business, economics, and free enterprise. The program consists of three main parts: (1) curriculum presented at the school prior to the Towne visit; (2) participation in the Day in Towne simulation; and (3) post simulation activities completed at school after the site visit. Before starting the program, teachers may elect to participate in an orientation program, which is a day-long training that highlights the curriculum and explains how to implement the school-based portions.

The AmeriTowne program is privately funded through donations and sponsorships and is accessible to all public school districts in Colorado. Participation in the AmeriTowne program is voluntary, and students from a wide cross section participate each year, including public schools, private and charter schools, as well as homeschooled groups. The program provides an experiential educational opportunity that more than 235 schools across Colorado participate in each year (Young Americans Center, 2013).

Additionally, one component of the program provides for students to participate in a simulation of the work world to gain experience and understanding of how it functions.

Groups participating in the program use the AmeriTowne curriculum and materials to present thirty to forty hours of classroom instruction introducing concepts such as supply and demand, job skills and work habits, banking procedures, democratic processes, civic consciousness, and career awareness. Generally, teachers spend approximately seven weeks addressing the AmeriTowne lesson sequence, which is designed to reinforce traditional concepts found in language arts, social studies and math standards. Additional lessons and group activities address new concepts relating to the free enterprise system, help ready students for tasks related to their day in Towne and highlight ideas that help prepare them for their future lives in adulthood. Following these lessons, students participate in the culminating experience: the Day in Towne simulation. It is during their day at the Towne when the students-turned-citizens, apply concepts and skills they have learned by working together to operate seventeen businesses modeled to look and feel like a working city. At AmeriTowne, students are in charge; they name the businesses, advertise, create the goals for themselves and their companies, propose, vote on and enforce laws, and serve as the Towne's leaders, customers, and employees for the day. During the Day in Towne simulation, students are assigned a particular job in the Towne, all of which are mutually dependent on one another. The simulation itself progresses over the period of approximately four hours and the decisions made by individuals and groups have an impact on the remainder of the students in the simulation as well.

While AmeriTowne began with only one site, due to its popularity, it has since expanded to include another location locally in order to allow for more schools to participate. Most recently, it further expanded to include students residing outside of the Denver Metro area by creating the Rural AmeriTowne located near the Colorado/Kansas border. While there are similarities across the three locations, there are some differences in the physical structure of the environment as well as the business sponsors for each of the locations' Towne shops. Local and national businesses partner with the Young Americans Center for Financial Education (YACFE), (the YACFE is the organization who oversees the AmeriTowne program) to provide funding for the shops at the AmeriTowne sites. These sponsorships vary from site-to-site, and there is some variance in the types of businesses represented at the Rural AmeriTowne due in part to the need to represent the agriculturally based economy found in that part of the state.

Understanding the world requires experiencing it and constructing conscious models of how it functions (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). The AmeriTowne program provides an opportunity for students to participate in a live experiential simulation of the work world to gain experience and understanding of how it functions and to develop and use the necessary related skills. Additionally, it is one example of a contextualized learning environment that can be used to situate learning for elementary aged students and help them to develop the 21st century skills they will need for future success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the AmeriTowne program supports learning and incorporates 21st century knowledge and skills development for fifth graders through participation in an experiential simulation. Situated learning states that the learning process works most effectively when knowledge and skills are embedded in a context in which they will authentically be used. In the case of this study, learning is situated for students through the use of a simulation, a smaller version of the real world where students must apply academic, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills to a simulated work environment. By viewing the AmeriTowne program in action, it was possible to gather data on one example of situated learning, integrating 21st century skills in context for diverse groups of local elementary aged students.

Potential Significance

Dewey (1938) states that in-school experiences should be related to out-of-school experiences and that learning should take place in contexts in which the knowledge is to be applied. In Dewey's model of education, life and society outside the school are viewed as relevant, and he stressed that the curriculum should help students prepare for their future as citizens and workers. The AmeriTowne program provides a forum for elementary-aged students to view the connection between the school curriculum and the world beyond.

This study is important for several reasons. First, it highlights a program that has yet to be formally studied, and in the current educational climate, it is advantageous to know about as many different educational settings and learning environments as possible.

Second, it adds to the information regarding experiential education for elementary-aged students and to the dearth of information on experiential simulations for elementary students. Third, little exists regarding elementary aged students in regard to literature on 21st century knowledge and skills. Finally, by investigating the current practices of a program supporting 21st century skills in context, we can see that such practices offer something that may be applied to education in general.

This study will highlight the unique benefits provided by the AmeriTowne program. By relaying what was gleaned through observations, interviews, document analysis, and artifact review, I hope to bring to the forefront the distinctive merits of the AmeriTowne program as an avenue for learning through the patterns, themes and opportunities it provides.

Research Questions

This study investigates the AmeriTowne program and how it supports learning and incorporates 21st century knowledge and skills development for fifth graders through participation in an experiential simulation. To this end, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the intentions of the Young AmeriTowne program?
2. What conditions does the Young AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation provide for educational experience?
3. Which aspects of the AmeriTowne's Day in Towne simulation participation facilitate students developing and utilizing 21st century knowledge and skills?

4. What is the educational importance for those involved in the Young AmeriTowne program?
5. How are AmeriTowne's theories and practices applicable in K-12 classrooms across the nation?

Question one addresses the intentions of the AmeriTowne program. *Intentions*, refers to the stated aims of AmeriTowne, using Eisner's (1991, 2002) intentional dimension of the ecology of schooling that helps us evaluate a program in terms of how the stated aims do or do not manifest within the program. As a researcher in this setting, I am interested in what this program aspires to accomplish through its explicitly stated goals using its unique experiential approach and focuses on the goals and aims of the program considering intentions from different standpoints: as outlined by the YACFE, and as they have been interpreted and expanded upon by individuals working within various roles of the AmeriTowne program.

Question two considers the conditions and the distinctive circumstances provided by the AmeriTowne simulation and speaks to the day to day operation of the simulation detailing what it looks like in practice, explaining how the day is organized, describing the types of activities, encounters, situations, and opportunities offered to students. The descriptions in Chapter Four detail the activities and student interactions observed during the Day in Towne simulation and work to uncover the benefits of the AmeriTowne program.

Question three considers the ways in which the AmeriTowne program's experiential simulation specifically supports students developing 21st century knowledge

and skills. Question four focuses on the educational importance (meanings) I gleaned from the participants' experience through observations and interviews. Finally, question five addresses this program's significance more broadly taking the conclusions drawn from this study and considering how these might contribute to the larger context of the American educational system.

To answer the research questions, a guiding framework that incorporates five of Eisner (1991, 2002) and Urhmacher's (1991) six dimensions of schooling was utilized. These dimensions are interconnected and influence the types of experiences children have. These dimensions will be further addressed in subsequent chapters.

Overview of Methodology

Educational Connoisseurship and Educational Criticism

In order to fully describe the intricacies of the AmeriTowne program, I chose Educational Connoisseurship and Educational Criticism (also known as Educational Criticism) as my methodology. Eisner (1991) explains that in an Educational Criticism feedback must be both critical and supportive. He furthered this by stating, "It is important to provide criticism in a form that leads to constructive, not destructive, results" (p. 117). The aims of this method match the purpose of my study: to improve educational practice through the understanding of how experiential environments and situated learning support the development of 21st century knowledge and skills for elementary-aged students. Educational Criticism uses four dimensions: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics to articulate what was encountered in the

research setting, with the ultimate goal of helping others to also see and understand (Eisner, 1991). This method will be described in Chapter Three.

Selecting the Site

Due to my familiarity and background with the AmeriTowne program, I was easily able to access personnel at the YACFE who oversee the AmeriTowne program. At the time of the present study, I was in my fifth year teaching fifth graders, having also attended the AmeriTowne program with all five of these fifth grade classes. During the fall preceding data collection, I arranged a meeting with the Vice President of Programs at the YACFE. The purpose of this meeting was to determine if the center was willing to allow me to use their AmeriTowne site to collect data for my dissertation study. During this half-hour long meeting, I gave an overview of what my study would entail. While enthusiastic toward the idea, stating that to date there had not been any research studies conducted, he shared that he needed to discuss it first with the center's Chief Executive Officer. Permission was ultimately granted, allowing me to access any or all of the three AmeriTowne sites, and I was given full access to materials and personnel related to the AmeriTowne program. The Vice President of Programs was designated as my contact for further needs related to the study. Due to the high interest of the YACFE toward my study, they granted permission for me to use the program's real name in lieu of a pseudonym.

Data Collection

For this study, data collection included observational data gathered at one site on multiple days. During the fifty-six hours of observations, I observed 14 distinct school

groups on 14 different days, observing over 1300 students in total as they participated in the Day in Towne simulation. I interviewed the Vice President of Programming at the YACFE and several staff members in the AmeriTowne program to aid in interpreting aspects of the intended and operational curriculums (see definitions below). Also included in this study were document analysis and artifact review. Chapter Three will detail the methodology, site and participants, and the specifics of data collection and analysis.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation provides a view of the AmeriTowne program as one way to support learning. Chapter Two will: (1) review the literature related to the AmeriTowne program; (2) provide an overview on learning theory; (3) consider environments and context in relation to learning and explore types of contextualized learning; and (4) discuss 21st century knowledge and skills and their importance for today's students. Chapter Three will explain Educational Criticism and detail the methods used for this particular study. Chapter Four provides an analysis of qualitative data and includes my interpretations and evaluations. Finally, Chapter Five connects the research with related literature, responds again to the research questions, and proffers limitations of the findings of the study. The following provides a definition of important terms related to this study.

Definition of Terms

- 21st century knowledge refers to the subject material that enhances traditional content standards in today's schools, as defined by the Partnership for 21st

Century Skills (P21, 2006). Included are: global awareness, health and wellness education, civic, financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacies (further defined below).

- 21st century skills/competencies refer to behaviors and attitudes demonstrated by students that are believed to be increasingly important to student success. Such skills as creativity, innovation, flexibility/adaptability, initiative/self-direction, social/cross-cultural skills, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, productivity/accountability, and leadership/responsibility as defined by the P21 organization.
- Curriculum refers to the series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students (Eisner, 2002). For the purpose of this study, “curriculum” will be divided into three distinct parts: the *intentional*, the *operational*, and the *received*. The difference in what was planned and what occurs in educational classrooms and settings distinguishes the “intentional” and “operational curriculums”. The *intentional curriculum* can then be defined as the anticipated course of study as set out or planned ahead of time. The *operational curriculum* can be viewed as “the unique set of events that transpire within a classroom. It is what occurs between teachers and students and between students and students” (Eisner, 2002, p. 33). It is what occurs during teaching and learning, whether intended or not, and comprises the experiences and practices as they actually occurred. The *received curriculum* is/ are the benefits students gained from the educational experience.

- Global Awareness refers to the ability students have to understand and address global issues, learning from and working with individuals from varied backgrounds; collaborating and respecting open dialogues in their personal lives, work and in the community. Global awareness includes understanding and respecting other nations and cultures and includes the use of non-English languages (P21, 2006).
- Financial/ Economic/ Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy refers to students' knowledge of how to make personal economic choices and to understand the role of the economy in society as well as to the ability to use entrepreneurial skills to broaden career options (P21, 2006).
- Civic Literacy refers to students' ability to participate effectively in civic life, stay informed of, and have a good understanding about governmental processes in order to exercise these rights at a local, state and national level as well as to understand both local and/or global implications of civic decisions (P21, 2006).
- Health Literacy refers to students' ability to better obtain, interpret and understand basic health care information and understand preventive physical and mental health measures necessary to set health goals and create an awareness of national and international public health and safety issues (P21, 2006).
- Environmental Literacy refers to the investigation of environmental issues to find effective solutions based off a demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the environment. It encourages taking individual and collective action toward addressing environmental challenges (P21, 2006).

- Creativity and Innovation refers to students' creation of new and worthwhile ideas using a broad range of idea creation techniques where students evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative endeavors (P21, 2006).
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving refers to students acquiring the ability to reason effectively, make judgments and decisions and solve problems in both conventional and innovative ways (P21, 2006).
- Communication and Collaboration refer to students communicating thoughts and ideas articulately using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills and often requires effective listening and communication in diverse environments and teams. It asks students to assume shared responsibility, show flexibility and compromise in order to accomplish goals (P21, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this section is to present a review of the literature relating to the inquiry into the Young AmeriTowne program. Because AmeriTowne is a program found only in Colorado, an initial review of the literature revealed limited entries related to the topic of this study. Several search strategies were employed in an attempt to determine the scope of the available literature. Electronic searches using multiple key words and combinations of words yielded some potential connections but no resources that directly address the questions proposed in this study. Items found included several articles from newspapers across the state of Colorado, a number of blog entries, and an article in local business magazine. Terms used included, but were not limited to, the following: Ameritowne; Young Ameritowne; Ameritowne program; Ameritowne program participation; Ameritowne simulation; elementary students and AmeriTowne, as well as a combination of searches on the Young Americans Center for Financial Education. Electronic searches were conducted using both scholarly and popular search engines and interfaced library references. On-site searches of major educational journals at university libraries also yielded no qualitative or quantitative studies directly related to the topic of this study. The scope of the search was widened in an attempt to reveal relevant research related to programs determined to be similar in nature to the Young Ameritowne program. Entries related to the topics of economic education using Junior Achievement

programs were found and deemed not to have a bearing on the present study. Again, popular literature such as newspaper articles were also located, none of which held any relation to the present study.

Literature was located on the topics of experiential education, experiential simulations, constructivist learning environments, and contextualized learning, all of which have relation to the current study. Information on learning theory was also reviewed and included. Dissertations and articles directly addressing 21st century knowledge and skills were also found. These studies were seeking to understand how faculties and schools might approach programming for students and did not address students in relation to the topic. The body of literature in the field of 21st century knowledge and skills contained information with direct bearing on the study. No studies directly related to the research questions were located.

Therefore, in order to establish a historical and theoretical framework for this study, the review is drawn from three bodies of literature. The first section provides a historical context on, and introduces current information related to, learning theory. The second section focuses learning environments in relation to learning theory. The literature review concludes with a section focused on 21st century knowledge and skills.

Learning Theory

In this section, I give an overview of learning theory and its relation to modern education broadly. I also discuss learning theory in relation to this study in particular. While there has not been any research published to date on the Young AmeriTowne program itself, in this chapter I detail several important elements related to it and discuss

learning environments such as contextualized learning environments and simulations. I explore the connection between school learning and the world beyond and consider 21st century knowledge and skills in relation to the above. Ultimately, I suggest why studying public elementary school students in a contextualized learning environment such as that found at the AmeriTowne program may provide additional information on how students can develop and utilize 21st century knowledge and skills in a true-to-life way.

Learning theory is a framework that describes the way(s) information is absorbed, processed, and retained during learning (Fosnot, 2005). Within learning theory, historically, three schools of thought helped explain ways in which learning occurs, namely: cognitivism, behaviorism, and constructivism. Generally, cognitivism focuses on internal thought processes and cognition; behaviorism posited learning as a change in behavior due to reinforcement; and constructivism views learning as meaning making wherein each individual constructs his own meaning based on current and past experiences (Fosnot, 2005; Illeris, 2009). Presently, learning theory acknowledges a much broader scope than once considered and includes emotional, social, and societal dimensions. In turn, specialized and over-lapping theories of learning continue to be developed. Some of these theories refer back to more traditional understandings, and others attempt to explore new possibilities and ways of thinking in relation to the ever-changing educational climate found in today's world (Illeris, 2009).

While there is no generally accepted definition of the term, traditionally, learning has been understood mainly as the acquisition of knowledge (Illeris, 2009, p.1). For many years, learning was regarded as simply a receptive process where the learner, similar to

an empty vessel, could be filled with knowledge and information. Therefore, one goal of education was the transmission of information to students for the purpose of imitation and storage to factual memory. More recently, cognitive psychology finds that learning is a complicated process comprised of the combination between both internal and external conditions. Vygotsky (1978) termed these two parts of the process the cognitive and the emotional. Similarly, Illeris (2009) describes learning as “the integration of external interaction processes between the learner and his or her social, cultural or material environment, and an internal psychology process of elaboration and acquisition” (p. 8). In this sense, the internal is features of learning found within the learner and the external is features outside of the learner influencing learning possibilities or the learning process. As such, learning can then be viewed as a more natural process that leads to changes in what we know, what we can do, and how we behave (Gagne et al., 2005). The learning theory that best supports the internal and external components of learning working in conjunction during the learning process is constructivism.

Constructivism

Constructivism is often viewed as a synthesis of multiple theories diffused into one form. It is the assimilation of both behaviorist and cognitive ideals. The “constructivist stance maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 260). The theory of constructivism rests on the notion that there is an innate human drive to make sense of the world (Fosnot, 2005). Instead of absorbing or passively receiving objective knowledge that is "out there," learners actively construct knowledge by integrating new

information and experiences into what they have previously come to understand by revising and reinterpreting old knowledge in order to reconcile it with the new (Gottlieb, 2000). Modern constructivism is a theory that can be traced to the work of Dewey (1929), Piaget (1952), Bruner (1966), and Vygotsky (1978) and others. It concedes that knowledge is constructed by the individual through interactions with his environment, and it focuses on meaning-making and understanding taking into consideration such factors as one's background, experience, culture, and language. The way in which knowledge is conceived and acquired, the types of knowledge, skills and activities emphasized, the role of the learner and the teacher, and how goals are established are all factors expressed differently in the constructivist perspective than in other learning theories (Lawless, 2008). Within constructivism itself authors, researchers, and theorists, articulate differently the constructivist perspective by emphasizing different components and therefore have evolved the theory in different directions.

Constructivism can be viewed from an individual standpoint, as each person making meaning intrinsically using his own previous and current knowledge or from a social constructivist perspective wherein learning and knowledge is created through discourse and social interactions with others (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The latter stance suggests that learners create their own meanings from experience within a social, interactive environment, acknowledging that this process varies depending on an individual's capacity or confidence. Whether knowledge is seen as socially formed or whether it is considered to be of an individual construction has implications for the ways in which both teaching and learning are conceptualized. Over the past twenty or so years,

much attention has been given to the exploration of constructivism from the standpoint of practice in terms of instructional design and constructivist pedagogy (often called constructivist learning or constructivist teaching) versus strictly considering constructivism from a theoretical perspective (Fosnot, 1989; Gagne, Briggs, & Wager, 1992; Duffy et al., 1993; Honebein et al., 1993; Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Gagne et al., 2005; Illeris, 2009; Tobias & Duffy, 2009). Prior to constructivism, theorists asserted that knowledge was based on transference from another individual or an object such as a book directly to the learner. In contrast, constructivists suggest that learners are continuously adapting to their environment in terms of their understanding of a phenomenon or changes in their social world (Fenwick, 2003). While traditional teaching and learning then tended to be a passive experience for the student who receives knowledge from the teacher, constructivist pedagogy emphasizes learning by doing, learning from experience, and problem solving. In order to learn by doing, a student must not solely read from a textbook or listen to a lecture rather the student must engage in authentic problems in their authentic context (Herrington & Oliver, 2000).

As previously stated, constructivism (as a theory of learning) has shifted to also include the creation of new modes of “constructivist instruction” (Fosnot, 1989; Gagne, Briggs & Wager, 1992; Duffy et al., 1993, Brooks & Brooks, 1999, Gagne et al., 2005; Illeris, 2009; Tobias & Duffy, 2009). The use of the broader term instruction purposely moves beyond merely thinking in terms of teaching by placing an emphasis on a range of activities the teacher uses to engage students, giving consideration to such things as selecting materials, preparing a learning environment, gauging student readiness to learn,

monitoring activities and serving as a content resource and facilitator to learning.

Constructivist instruction takes into account factors both external and internal to the learner collectively affecting learning. External factors such as the learning environment and its resources and the management of learning activities interact with internal conditions such as states of mind, previous learning and the personal goals of individuals (Gagne et al., 2005). In the contemporary world, one goal of constructivist instruction is to develop self-directed yet interdependent learners who can access and use a wide range of cognitive structures in order to transfer learning to contexts they have yet to encounter (Kerka, 1997).

The advent of constructivist instructional practices emphasizes the need for the creation of “constructivist learning environments” (Fosnot, 1989; Duffy et al., 1993; Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Gagne et al., 2005; Tobias & Duffy, 2009) in order to meet the needs of learners in formal school settings. A constructivist learning environment is viewed to be more learner centered than teacher centered (Proulx, 2006) resulting in additional thought as to what should be taught and how might this best be learned. When planning for constructivist learning, the teacher must recognize what surroundings are conducive to experiences that lead to growth (Roberts, 2003). Most notably, Jonassen (1994) suggests that constructivist learning environments subscribe to eight essential characteristics. Namely they must:

1. provide for multiple representations of reality
2. represent the complexity of the real-world
3. emphasize knowledge construction versus reproduction

4. utilize authentic tasks in meaningful context(s)
5. provide learning environments such as real-world settings or case-based learning
6. encourage thoughtful reflection on experience
7. enable context- and content-dependent knowledge construction
8. support collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation

While the Young AmeriTowne program does not label itself as such instead considering itself “an experiential simulation” (Young AmeriTowne, 2013), it does subscribe to Jonassen’s tenets and could therefore be classified as a constructivist learning environment. Furthermore, there are a number of pedagogical approaches that support a constructivist learning framework within constructivist learning environments (Tobias & Duffy, 2009) that apply to the present AmeriTowne study. The following section provides information on those most pertinent to this study.

Experiential Education

Experiential education, as defined by the Association for Experiential Education (AEE), is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage learners in direct experience (and often times focused reflection) in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop ones capacity to contribute to their communities. Experiential education can best be described as learning by doing or active learning.

Experiential education is utilized in a variety of disciplines including both formal and informal educational settings. Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, to make decisions, and to be accountable for results. There are a vast number of

terms often referred to that describe experiential education: experience-based learning, place-based learning, project-based learning, environmental education, outdoor education, active learning, service learning, expeditionary learning, among others (AEE, 2014).

Throughout the educational experience, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning. In experiential education settings, relationships are often developed: learner to others and learner to the world at large. The educator and learners may experience success or failure in the experience because outcomes cannot totally be predicted. The educator's role includes setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, and facilitating the learning process. The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences derived from mistakes and successes. The dominant approach to understanding experiential education has revolved around cognitive reflection upon concrete experiences, an orientation commonly known as constructivism (Fenwick, 2001).

Experiential Learning in Relation to Experiential Education

Dewey (1938) was one of the first theorists to state, "all genuine education comes about through experience" (p. 13). He also had the insight to warn that "not all experience educates" and that some experiences "mis-educate" and "distort growth" which "narrows the field of further experiences" (Dewey, 1938, p. 13) Dewey argues that in order for experience to become a true learning experience, it must exhibit two properties: (a)

"continuity," which consists of experiences that have come previously and which affect the experiences that come in the future, and (b) "interaction," which occurs between an individual and their surroundings (Dewey, 1938, p. 41). In essence, Dewey laid down the foundation for the current theories of experiential learning as well as that of situated learning. Bailey et al. (2004) have expanded this principle and have stated that "the person does not simply undergo an experience, but participates in it, constructing its meaning as it evolves" (p. 30).

Today, the Experiential Learning approach is perhaps best known from the work of David Kolb. It offers a foundation for an approach to education that links formal learning (schooling) and the real world based on Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951), Piaget (1952), and Bruner (1966). It emphasizes personal experiences and self-direction using a competence-centered curriculum geared toward life-long learning Kolb (1984). This approach is termed "experiential" because it highlights the central role "experience" plays in the learning process underscoring acquisition and recall like many traditional methods of education. Major elements of experiential learning focus on: concrete experiences, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and testing the implications of these concepts in new situations (Kolb, 1984). In experiential learning, learning focuses on the process versus the outcomes, acknowledging no two individuals will glean the same learning since individual "experiences" will vary.

Echoing Dewey, another core proposition of experiential learning states that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience and always building on previous

knowledge and experience that requires the resolution of conflicting information (Kolb, 1984). It describes learning in terms of being the central process of human adaptation to both the social and physical environment (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning bases importance on learners getting as close as possible to the material content of what is hoped to be learned and then doing something with it (Pritchard, 2008). By undertaking actions and activities, mental or physical, which center on the concepts and skills in question, it is believed learners are in a position to move forward in their learning. In experiential learning, learning is the process of creating knowledge involving transactions between the person and the environment and is an active, self-directed process that can be applied to both formal schooling and everyday life.

Although many experts agree that meaningful learning for students is linked to experience (Dewey, 1938; Richmond, 1973; Kolb, 1984; Bruner, 1990; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) more research is needed to expand our current understanding of how students learn through experience. Experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning, and many theorists believe that the use of reflection and dialogue with others based on each new experience effectively leads to "meaning-making" and new knowledge (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991) particularly when learning is context-based or situated.

Situated Learning

Situated learning is a form of experiential learning, and it is believed that learning is anchored in the "situation" in which the experience is occurring and not in the individual (Resnick, 1987; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991;

McLellan, 1996). This is the key difference between situated learning and other forms of experiential learning. Both theories acknowledge that learning and experience occur in the social world, but other theories of experiential learning assign more importance to the individual while situated learning gives more emphasis to the social realm. Situated learning emphasizes that knowledge is situated in the activity of the learner and is a product of that activity and forms through the context and culture in which it occurs. This context may be a concrete external situation or can assume the character of a mental framework that supports the particularization of meaning by eliminating ambiguities or concurrent meanings that do not seem to be adequate (Van Oers, 1998).

Situated learning involves engaging in tasks, which parallel real-world applications. It emphasizes the application of knowledge rather than the memorization of facts (Heeter, 2005). Situated learning emphasizes social interactions and authentic learning and believes students who work on an authentic learning task learn associated facts and skills because they need to know these things to accomplish the task (Pritchard, 2008).

Within situated learning is the idea that others are involved in this learning. This is termed cognitive apprenticeship (Collins, 1991). Apprenticeship uses different pedagogical tools than traditional instruction such as modeling processes and modeling performance. These allow the student to see solutions to problems and often make visible parts of a process not always normally seen (Duffy et al., 2004). And this allows students to integrate knowledge. This modeling can come from a teacher or adult “expert” or a more competent peer. From an instructional standpoint, in an apprenticeship

situation, a teacher takes on more of the role of a coach or facilitator providing help directed at critical points in the learning. Key characteristics of cognitive apprenticeship include articulation (making tacit knowledge explicit) and apprentice exploration (forming and testing hypotheses) (Duffy et al., 2004).

Hansman (2001) draws similarities between situated learning and experiential education in that experiential education focuses on performing an activity that results in new knowledge. Experiential assignments may be a self-directed activity in which the student obtains guidelines in advance and is expected to perform the activity without any supervision. Situated learning, on the other hand, includes self-direction and "doing" but also focuses on the relationship between the learner and other learners and the tools of the socio-cultural environment. Learners, for example, may form groups and continue learning in other locations or more experienced participants may share their knowledge with less experienced ones. Students potentially learn answers not only to current issues but upcoming ones as well. Finally, a dialectic process may occur between participants (Hansman, 2001, p. 46).

There is a significant link between the idea of learning being situated and the need for authentic learning as seen in several of the recommendations above. Authentic learning deals with the context or conditions in which learning activities occur. Resnick (1987), Brown et al. (1989), Bruner (1996), and others support the need for culturally linked and authentic learning tasks through situated learning. Authentic learning and tasks are those to which students can relate their own experience (both in and out of school) or tasks, which an experienced practitioner might undertake (Selinger, 2001), and

those that match the real-world tasks of professionals in practice as nearly as possible (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). It is believed that learning rises to the level of authenticity when it asks students to work actively with abstract concepts, facts, and formulae inside a realistic and highly social context mimicking the ordinary practices of the culture (Lombardi, 2007).

Situated learning supports environments where students engage in such authentic experiences that provide opportunities to explore and expand on their knowledge. Using or simulating the real-world environment by actually being in a place where that particular skill or knowledge is used in the world and supplying a more authentic context for learning increases the chance that a lesson will be remembered and can be used in other similar situations (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Situated Learning Environments

Perhaps the most fundamental property of a constructivism in terms of creating a learning environment is that it offers an authentic context that provides an opportunity for learning to occur (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993; Jonassen & Land, 2000; Collins, 2008; Tobias & Duffy, 2009). From a constructivist point of view, knowledge is contextualized and learning is situated within application. It suggests that "learning is an everyday event that is social in nature because it occurs with other people, and it is the interaction with the setting itself that determines the learning" (Wilson, 1993, p. 13).

As has previously been discussed, when considering a theory about learning such as constructivism or situated learning, often the question remains as to how to best transfer this information into practices about *teaching*. Brown and Duguid (1993)

acknowledge that one of the most persistent questions following the discussion of situated learning has dealt with how the theory might be operationalized, thus allowing for transfer into teaching methods, which in turn, could be applied to classrooms. Most recently, Herrington & Oliver (2000) respond to this question by outlining a practical framework for the design of learning environments and suggest that situated learning environments (also known as contextualized learning environments) offer the following characteristics:

1. Provide *authentic contexts* that reflect the way the knowledge will be used in real life
2. Provide *authentic activities*
3. Provide access to *expert performances* and the modeling of processes
4. Provide *multiple roles and perspectives*
5. Support *collaborative construction of knowledge*
6. Promote *reflection* to enable abstractions to be formed
7. Promote *articulation* to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit
8. Provide *coaching* and *scaffolding* by the teacher at critical times
9. Provide for *authentic assessment* of learning within the tasks

By providing the tenets mentioned above, a situated or contextualized learning environment creates a space where the quality of instructional materials and the educational environment cannot be considered independently of the manner in which they are used. A situated learning environment creates a learning environment based on collaboration and provides forms of scaffolding to support the construction of knowledge.

The emphasis in a situated learning environment is on reflective responses that contribute to the creation of authentic products and that require each participant to contribute a unique function or role (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). A simulation is one type of situated learning environment (Tobias & Duffy, 2009).

Simulations. While learning must occur in context according to the situated model, the context for learning can be the actual setting or can be a highly realistic surrogate of the actual environment (McLellan, 1994). Additionally, in order to support students' learning, these contexts may also be a simplified version of the real world context in which similar skills might be used (Swaak & de Jong, 2001; Gredler, 2004; Aldrich, 2004). This allows younger students in particular to have access to only the elements of this experience that are appropriate to their developmental level, and allows other unnecessary distractions to be removed while still allowing for situated learning and understanding of the skills they are developing and the problems they are solving (Aldrich, 2004). Often these contexts offer opportunities for students to develop a distributed understanding of the skills and the problems through social interaction and negotiation of shared meaning. In this sense, students do not need to memorize all the answers or have all the information required of the context because they can call upon the skills and tools of other individuals within the context to aid them in their learning, supporting cognitive apprenticeship. Often simplified contexts are found as micro-worlds (computerized games that provide risk free learning environments where students experience issues or learn strategies) or are simulations of one form or another (computer-based or live action role play) both of which allow users to learn by practicing

in a focused environment where not all outcomes can be predicted (Aldrich, 2004).

Simulations can utilize a variety of approaches such as: multi-person, individual, can be scripted or open-ended, and employ free play or use skill based tasks (sometimes both) depending on the type of learning sought (Aldrich, 2004). In the case of the present study, the AmeriTowne Day in Towne is a multi-student, live-action, semi-open-ended experiential simulation that requires students to utilize both skill based tasks and role-playing, and may best be described as an experiential simulation.

Experiential simulations were originally developed to provide learner interactions in situations that were too costly or hazardous to provide in a real-world setting (Norman, 1993; Williams, 2010). Today, experiential simulations have begun to fulfill broader functions such as allowing learners to interact with real-world scenarios and experience the feelings, questions, and concerns associated with their particular role (Gredler, 2004). That is experiential simulations allow for learners to be immersed in a complex, evolving situation in which he or she is one of the functional components. Of primary importance to any simulation is the fit between the experience and the social reality it is meant to portray (Alessi, 1988). Experiential simulations require the maximum student involvement in their own learning through active responding where the students are in control of the action involved in the setting they have been transported to (Williams, 2010). Well-designed simulations are both challenging and interesting for those involved and require the application of particular knowledge or skills related to concepts or content they are portraying. Important characteristics of experiential simulations are as follows: the experiential simulation must provide an adequate model of the complex real-world

situation with which the students interact and must provide a defined role for each participant that includes both responsibilities and constraints; the experiential simulation must provide a data-rich environment that permits students to execute a range of strategies both targeted (desired strategies) and allow for spontaneous decision making, and must provide feedback for participant actions in the form of changes in the overall problem or situation the simulation supplies (Gredler, 2004). The goal for all participants is to each take a particular role, address the issues, threats, or problems that arise in the situation, and experience the effects of their decisions.

The basis for any simulation is a dynamic set of relationships among several variables that reflect authentic causal or relational processes, and they must be verifiable. Situations can take different directions depending on the actions and reactions of the participants. That is a simulation is an evolving case study of a particular social or physical reality in which the participants take on bona fide roles with well-defined responsibilities and constraints (Gredler, 2004).

Simulations can run from fifty minutes to several days and use role descriptions including goals, constraints, background information, and responsibilities (Gredler, 2004). Simulations generally have ill-defined problems with several parameters and possible courses of action (Gredler, 2004). Specifically, ill-defined problems are those in which portions of the givens, the desired goal, or the allowable steps and are not immediately clear (Mayer & Wittrock, 1996). These types of problems are important for students to encounter because unlike most educational materials that address well-defined problems, most problems in the “real-world” are not well defined, rather are dynamic in

nature (Gredler, 2004). Another benefit provided by simulations is the idea that cross-disciplinary (also known as integrated or blended learning) is supported because knowledge and skills are used in conjunction dynamically, not separated into unique subject matters (Aldrich, 2004).

As previously stated, simulations provide complex environments that improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills, expose students to the multiple perspectives of others through collaboration and social negotiation with peers and/or teachers, all while also integrating subject material.

21st Century Knowledge and Skills

The overall shift in thinking on the process of learning coincides with new purposes for education. Whereas previously much emphasis has been on the teaching, educationally we are now moving to an increased emphasis on the learning. Here the emphasis becomes less on the knowledge itself and more about the application of the knowledge (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Illeris, 2009). Over the past decade, many organizations such as P21 have advocated for standards that address both the core academic content and integrate complex thinking skills, connect student learning, promote student interaction, and emphasize learning for the future.

The idea that our current educational system does not meet the needs (current or future) of our students is not new. Resnick (1987) first detailed the disconnect between in school teaching of skills and the out of school usage of those same skills. She explained that our educational system has long been focusing on individual cognition even though the activities in and out of school are socially shared. Additionally, she states

the emphasis that school places on thinking and doing without the use of any aids (tools) is at odds with the way that almost any real life use of knowledge is performed outside of school where the use of tools abounds. Resnick (1987) further explains her belief in the importance of situated learning versus classroom learning detailing three important points: Learning for economic preparation in life, lifelong learning, and preparation for civic and cultural participation in the social world. Subsequently, she opined that the most successful educational programs included three elements of situated learning: socially shared activities, apprentice-like structures, and course content designed to include student participation and meaning-making. Lastly, Resnick (1987) reminds us that schools should also focus on developing reasoning and reflection using shared cultural knowledge so that students may be better prepared to take their place in both the social world and the work world as well. Today, these ideas align with the goals set forth by P21: for students to develop the types of real world knowledge and skills to be ready to enter the post-secondary world.

Due to the shift in today's society and work sphere (from manufacturing of material goods to one of innovation and production of products and services), workplaces increasingly require students to have 21st century skills like communication, innovation, adaptability and higher order thinking skills (Wagner, 2008). Even though some schools have responded to these demands and made changes to embrace globalization, more work needs to be done to prepare students for life as global citizens and employees (Dede, 2007; Wagner, 2008; Friedman, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

As the United States continues to compete in the global economic marketplace, today's students and our nation's future workers need to have mastered such 21st century competencies that allow them to be effective participants and collaborators. Companies increasingly require employees who are critical thinkers, innovators, and communicators (Friedman, 2007; Wagner, 2008) in working arrangements that may be more flexible allowing for those who are able to adapt to new situations, cultures and forms of communication to excel. Despite the fact that the economic, private, and social spheres are assimilating, K-12 institutions still struggle to teach the knowledge and skills that prepare students for 21st century life, work, and society (Dede, 2007; Wagner, 2008; Friedman, 2009). As such, P21 has outlined a list of knowledge and skills they believe best help students prepare for better succeed in life outside of the classroom. In addition to traditional core subjects, which serve as the building blocks, P21 believes schools must promote an understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving additional 21st century interdisciplinary themes (skills) into these core subjects. As such, 21st century skills like flexibility/adaptability, initiative/self-direction, social/cross-cultural skills, productivity/accountability, and leadership/responsibility begin to take on greater importance when thinking in terms of what today's students need to succeed in a post-secondary world (P21, 2006; Dede, 2007; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). Having competencies that allow individuals to engage in complex tasks, thinking and communication, coupled with the ability to adapt to new situations flexibly, increases the chance that a student will be productive in the 21st century post-secondary world (Levy & Murnane, 2004; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). The ability to navigate the

complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age where factual knowledge is readily available via computers also require students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Learning and innovation skills are what separate students who are prepared for an increasingly complex life and work environment in today's world and those who are not (P21, 2006). Since educators are at the forefront, they are responsible for preparing the students to become the future of the workforce and the types of citizens' corporate leaders and the new society demands.

Summary

Limited information related to the Young AmeriTowne program or experiential simulations similar to it was located during an extensive search of the literature. Research related to the topics of learning theory, experiential simulations in general, experiential education and 21st century learning was located. The literature review for this study has examined concepts related to learning for elementary students and has provided a historical review on learning theory and also the ways that it is currently viewed for today's students. I also presented information on 21st century learning and its importance for today's students. Each section of the literature review contributed perspectives necessary for a thorough understanding of the topic examined in this study. Next, in Chapter Three, I discuss the research method I employed for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism

Educational Connoisseurship and Educational Criticism (1991, 2002) is the qualitative research methodology that was utilized for this study (hereafter, this will generally be referred to as Educational Criticism). An arts-based form of research developed by Eisner (2002), Educational Criticism takes its lead from the work that critics have done in areas such as literature, theater, film, and music, as well as the visual arts applying them to the study of education. The method is well established in educational research realms and has been used for over thirty years beginning at Stanford University and moving to other major institutions nationwide, including the University of Denver where it has a strong tradition in the school of education. This form of educational inquiry renders a vivid picture of educational settings and their activity and was developed as a method of qualitative research intended to improve education. In Eisner's words,

The primary ideal for educational criticism is that it should contribute to the enhancement of the educational process and through it to the educational enhancement of students. It is not a detached, value-neutral descriptive vehicle concerned only with something called disinterested knowledge, but rather is concerned with understanding for educational improvement. (1991, p.114)

This research tradition seeks to help others understand what the researcher sees and articulates the value of what the researcher believes those experiences provide

through highlighting both the achievements and possible problems. I chose this method for its capability to reveal the type of information that would answer my research questions. In this method, the researcher submerses herself in an educational environment with the aim of gaining perspective of the happenings found within. The researcher is then able to offer the reader an interpretation and understanding of this educational experience. The Educational Criticism method is comprised of two parts: connoisseurship, the art of appreciation, and criticism, the art of disclosure. When combined, they allow the researcher to capture and report the richness of an educational setting and its activities through the use of four dimensions: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics, which will be addressed further in this chapter (Eisner, 2002).

Eisner (1991) defines connoisseurship as the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex qualities. Unlike criticism, it is a private act where the connoisseur aims to appreciate the qualities that constitute some object, situation, or event. To be a connoisseur in some domain means to notice or experience the significant and often subtle qualities that constitute it (p. 85). It is the ability to make discriminations between examples, and to have an acute awareness about a subject or topic based off of expertise about this subject or topic. As Eisner states “Connoisseurship is the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest” (1991, p. 68).

Eisner (2002) cautions that the amount of experience alone is not necessarily what grants one a level of connoisseurship rather it is the combination of experience along with discernment. The art of discernment can be found in Creswell’s (2007) description of the

role that insight, intuition, and impression have on the role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry. In the case of this Educational Criticism, as a connoisseur of education, I brought an extensive personal experience and familiarity with educational settings, student behavior, pedagogical practice, and background with instructional material to the research setting and used this to discern the unique qualities found within the study's setting and activity.

I am a National Board Certified Teacher (Middle Child Generalist) with over two decades of teaching experience at the elementary and middle school levels. My experience spans all grades in K-6 and while the majority of this experience has been in public schools, I have also taught a few years in private, charter, and magnet schools, which provided alternative pedagogical settings. At the time of the present study, I was in my fifth year teaching fifth graders, having also attended the AmeriTowne program with all five of these fifth grade classes. I currently still teach fifth grade in a high need, diverse, public school. I believe in constructivism, student autonomy in relationship to learning, and in social learning and I believe that experiential education is powerful for students in developing an understanding of concepts. While I was cognizant of my own views at all points during this study, every effort was made to remove possible biases in the research. However, for the sake of disclosure, I believe it is important to share my background with education in general, and my favorable opinion toward the AmeriTowne program in particular as it would not be possible to remove my prior knowledge and experience, which in turn informed my qualifications as a connoisseur. While I am certainly a strong advocate for this program, and believe it holds many strengths, I also

recognize that no educational setting is perfect and there is always room for continued improvement. In Chapter Five I will present several recommendations that I believe would benefit students and their learning.

In Educational Criticism, the criticism becomes the connoisseur's disclosure of the perceptions made, so that others not possessing this level of connoisseurship can also enter into the work. Eisner (2002) states, "criticism does not mean the negative appraisal of something but rather the illumination of something's qualities so that an appraisal of its value can be made" (p. 215). Educational Criticism relies on the two facets (connoisseurship and criticism) working in conjunction with each other to tell a story. Because of this, one cannot be a critic without having an adequate level of experience and expertise that of a connoisseur. Additionally, Eisner best states an important point that is true of any Educational Criticism, when he said,

What we begin to recognize when we consider what connoisseurship entails is that the perceptual processes operate within an array of values and theoretical concepts that influence perception. Individuals working with different theories- whether normative or descriptive- will attend to different phenomena within the "same" setting and interpret their significance differently. (2002, p. 218)

To that end, my role as researcher and connoisseur has been divulged, and findings will be elaborated throughout this study as viewed through specific lenses.

In Educational Criticism, the critic does not attempt to write about all that has been seen, but rather is selective in what is included (Eisner, 2002). Within the criticism segment, I will make public the findings and my judgments on what has been viewed. In this way, it is intended that the findings may add to the body of evidence on selected the educational topic.

The structure of Educational Criticism has four essential dimensions: description, interpretation, evaluation and thematics (Eisner, 2002). These dimensions are not mutually exclusive instead they are combined to form a system of inquiry that provides a deeper and richer understanding of the situation. While these are not treated in isolation rather they are layered throughout the study there are specific elements to each aspect.

Description, according to Eisner (2002), attempts to “identify and characterize, portray, or render in language the relevant qualities of educational life” (p. 226). In this study, the physical environment, its atmosphere, student and adult interactions, and events will be portrayed through the descriptive aspect. To make sure that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied, “thick” description was required and was used for the purpose of this study. Thick description (Denzin, 1989) presents details, context, emotions, and depicts social relationships. Such description allows the reader to see, feel, and hear as if they were present themselves. Observational field notes helped me to capture important elements and significant events pertaining to the research questions through the descriptive aspect. Use of direct quotes and sensory language was helpful and allows the reader to experience the setting and events vicariously. The descriptions used in this study are composite vignettes comprised from all of my observations. While the activities, conversations, and events did not necessarily happen in the sequence provided they did transpire at some point. Each quotation, conversation, experience, and activity described occurred at some point during my observations, and I have combined multiple observations through these composites to recreate a typical day in the Towne.

Whereas the descriptive aspect in the Educational Criticism was the account *of* the setting and activity, the interpretive aspect of the Educational Criticism is regarded as accounting *for* the educational setting and activity (Eisner, 2002). The interpretive therefore aims to relate what the situation means to those involved; for example, it provides answers to questions such as: How are things operating? What does the situation mean to those involved?

In the Educational Criticism, evaluation places value on the educational experiences described, appraising the merit of a set of circumstances, as interpreted by the researcher, and uses this in order to improve the educational process (Eisner, 2002). Because Educational Criticism seeks to improve schooling, in this study, I looked for the educational benefits one experience provided to students, (participation in the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation) and through evaluation, I offer, based on my interpretations and the application of other theories, the merits of such an experience.

The final aspect, *thematics*, derives major ideas or conclusions from the material found within the other aspects that preceded it (the descriptions, interpretations, and evaluation). It utilizes Eisner's third essential question of an educational critic: What ideas, concepts, or theories might be used to explain the setting's features? (Eisner, 2002). It is here that the researcher determines what larger lessons or implications this particular Educational Criticism has to offer through a summary of sorts, allowing the reader to grasp the essential points (Eisner, 2002). This portion of the study allowed me to develop themes and to provide findings that can ultimately be applied to other

educational endeavors. These themes were derived from several sources: emerging patterns in study's data, the researcher's personal experience, and the literature reviewed.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a method based on exploring and understanding a complex social or human situation or problem where the researcher builds a holistic picture by analyzing words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Characteristics of qualitative research studies include data collection in the field or "natural setting," use of multiple forms of data, and inductive data analysis, as well as a focus on the participants' meaning, a responsive or emergent design process, the use of a theoretical lens, interpretive inquiry, and the researcher as a key instrument (Creswell, 2007).

A qualitative method was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, qualitative research allowed me to understand the complexities and nuances of the AmeriTowne program and the experiences of the participants within their natural setting. Quantitative methods would not have been able to determine this type of rich, multifaceted information. Additionally, I wanted to illuminate the intricate experiences of the students and give them voice in this research project. Thirdly, context played a significant role in this study and qualitative research fills a need to understand and value how teaching and learning fit together in context (Clark, 1990). Finally, Clark (1990) relates that people are often moved to take specific action and advocate for change due to the influence of qualitative inquiry. My hope is that the current research might become a

provocation for change regarding the role of situated learning in experiential education for elementary students.

Validation and Reliability in Educational Criticism as Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers strive for understanding that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings (p. 201). While the qualitative approach “once garnered much scrutiny in the scientific ranks for its failure to adhere to the canons of reliability and validation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 202), in more recent years it has been much more widely accepted as an effective method for gathering research data. In a qualitative study, there is not necessarily the aim of finding the “right” answer rather it is important to take into consideration whether or not a particular account is valid and to determine by whose standard it is considered to be so (Creswell, 2007). Eisner addresses the ways that Educational Criticism can reasonably meet the standards of credibility through the use of three sources of evidence: structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy (Eisner, 1991, p. 110).

Structural corroboration is similar to the process of triangulation. Here multiple sources of data are related to each other to either support or perhaps contradict the interpretation and evaluation. Specifically for this study, direct observations, document analysis, artifact review, and information from interviews were compiled and compared to inform the interpretation, evaluation, and thematic portions of the Educational Criticism.

Consensual validation, according to Eisner, is “the agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an educational situation are right” (1991, p. 112). Eisner acknowledges that due to the role of the individual as connoisseur, there may be different interpretations of the same event; however, consensual validation is the process by which the researcher uses the weight of the evidence as well as his/her experience to persuade the reader and can also include agreement from members of the study as to the accuracy of the descriptions. As explained above, for this study, support from multiple sources of data will be utilized. Additionally, information was validated for accuracy through the use of member checking. In member checking, the researcher solicits participants’ views of the accuracy of the descriptions. This technique is considered to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This approach, in most qualitative studies, involves taking information back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account rendered. For this study, I shared my descriptions of the Day in Towne with interested AmeriTowne staff members and have included any responses I received in Chapter Four.

Another consideration for validity in an Educational Criticism is that it must have referential adequacy. Referential adequacy is the process of testing the overall criticism against the phenomena it seeks to describe, interpret, and evaluate. Because educational settings are dynamic by nature, it is assumed that no two researchers could conduct identical educational criticisms. However, referential adequacy is the extent to which a reader is able to locate in its subject matter the qualities the critic addresses and the

meanings he or she ascribes to them (Eisner, 1991, p. 114). In other words, referential adequacy is achieved when the researcher sufficiently describes and interprets something that helps to aid in understanding whether inside or outside of the experience. According to Eisner, an educational critic's work is considered to be referentially adequate when readers are able to see what they would have missed without the critic's observations (1991, p.114).

On the topic of validity and reliability, Eisner states, "We seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions" (1991, p. 110). That being said, he also acknowledges that the art of criticism is ultimately and inherently an act of judging stating, "It is reasonable to expect that we have good grounds for the judgments we make, but not that our judgments are certain" (Eisner, 1991, p. 109). Suffice it to say that not all individuals will judge a given situation the same way nor would they agree on what it might mean, or even on the value of the experience. While the AmeriTowne program could be appraised based off a number of criteria, for the purpose of this study, the Day in Towne simulation was observed. Interpretations and evaluations were informed through the application of Eisner (1991, 2002) and Uhrmacher's (1991) dimensions of schooling and the literature reviewed.

Generalizability in Educational Criticism as Qualitative Research

While qualitative data is not intended to be generalized rather "the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site" (Creswell, 2009, p. 193), certainly it is possible for information and/or

findings gleaned from one study to be applied to other studies or settings (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Eisner, 1991; Eisner, 2002; Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009). One type of generality that is fostered by Educational Criticism is what Eisner refers to as “the acquisition of new forms of anticipation” (2002). According to Eisner, Educational Criticism brings to light specifics in one educational example so that concepts and generalizations can be formed and then applied to new situations. This study investigated how the AmeriTowne program supports learning and incorporates 21st century knowledge and skills development for fifth graders through participation in an experiential simulation. Hopefully, findings from this study will add to the field of education, in particular, to the body of evidence dealing with elementary aged students, contextualized learning environments, experiential education, experiential simulations, and 21st century knowledge and skills. It therefore may be useful in helping other educational personnel and programs better address these topics in the future.

Research Questions and Study Design

In this study, I investigated how the AmeriTowne program supports learning and incorporates 21st century knowledge and skills development for fifth graders through participation in an experiential simulation. The program was selected because it offers a unique learning environment where students travel to a specially constructed site built to look, feel, and function as a genuine town would when run by students during a real-time, live simulation. The Towne is located within a reasonable proximity to both the University and the researcher’s home and therefore allowed numerous visits for data collection. The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the intentions of the Young AmeriTowne program?
2. What conditions does the Young AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation provide for educational experience?
3. Which aspects of the AmeriTowne's Day in Towne simulation participation facilitate students developing and utilizing 21st Century knowledge and skills?
4. What is the educational importance for those involved in the Young AmeriTowne program?
5. How are AmeriTowne's theories and practices applicable in K-12 classrooms across the nation?

Pilot Study

A four-day pilot study was conducted at the AmeriTowne headquarters site, located at the Young Americans Center for Financial Education (YACFE) in the month preceding data collection for this study. The purposes of the pilot study were to trial observational techniques and to formulate specific questions for the dissertation study. While I originally entertained the idea of using multiple sites for data collection because of the pilot study, I ultimately decided to use only the main AmeriTowne site located in the YACFE building for the subsequent dissertation study. This decision was made because throughout the course of the pilot I came to realize that due to its location, visitors were frequent to AmeriTowne at the headquarters site. The busy nature of the YACFE allowed for me to be less obtrusive, and thereby I decided it facilitated the ease of data collection as I perceived that I was not viewed as an outsider. This site also gave

me easy access to AmeriTowne personnel and the AmeriTowne materials, which I assumed would be beneficial for other aspects of my study.

During the pilot, four observations were conducted. Each observation lasted approximately four hours and encompassed the entire time that the scheduled schools visited the site and participated in the day in Towne simulation. None of the data obtained from the pilot study was included in this dissertation and due to the nature of the Day in Towne simulation schedule there was no overlap between schools included in the pilot and the dissertation studies. Following the pilot study an exempt application was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board prior to the collection of any data for this dissertation study.

Research Site

As previously stated, the main (headquarters) site was selected for all the observational data collection. This is an urban site located within the city of Denver and is therefore accessible to numerous school districts within the Denver metropolitan area. The headquarters site is home to the Young Americans Bank, YACFE's corporate offices, various training and meeting rooms, Young InternationalTowne, and the AmeriTowne facility. The Young AmeriTowne program is privately funded through donations and does not receive any type of federal funding.

Participants

The Young AmeriTowne program targets fifth grade students and involves more than 235 schools per year (Young Americans Center, 2012). The program has the ability to run both a full Towne scenario as well as a partial Towne version of the simulation

which is determined by the number of students attending the simulation. When not enough students are involved, a partial Towne set up is run, requiring some shops to be closed and jobs contained in those shops are not available. In order to avoid limiting potential data sources, I only selected observational dates for schools that were scheduled to implement a full Towne scenario. A full Towne scenario is conducted when schools bring between 80-110 students to participate in the simulation. While some private and charter schools attend the AmeriTowne program, this study only included public schools from the greater Denver metropolitan area. Public schools were selected as I viewed these as providing more of a typical cross section of students in terms of socio-economic, cultural/ethnic/linguistic backgrounds, and varied academic abilities. Visits to AmeriTowne are generally scheduled a year ahead of time and only traditional public schools running a full Towne scenario during the researcher's predetermined data collection time frame (Spring 2013) were considered for this study. The Vice President of Programming forwarded to me the dates of any schools meeting the criteria for the study. I selected dates from this list and the YACFE sent notification letters to the schools corresponding to those dates.

IRB Considerations

Once I had selected potential dates for observations, the administrators from the schools were notified via email by the Vice President of Programming regarding the presence of a researcher on site. The email contained a letter attachment that explained who I was, the general purpose and nature of the study being conducted, and what type of data I would be collecting. This letter explained that schools had the opportunity to

express any objections to having their students observed and asked administrators to share this information with teachers and parent volunteers who would be visiting AmeriTowne (See Appendix A). If an administrator objected to having data collected on students, that school's students were not included in the study, and an alternative date and likewise school was scheduled for observation in its place.

There was also an additional attachment included in the email (Appendix B) containing a brief five-question (and optional) demographic survey. This survey asked the schools to provide general numbers about the students who would be attending the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation. Questions requested the general range for the total number of students attending and asked questions in the form of ranges for the number of students in several sub-populations (identified gifted students, identified English Language Learners, identified special education students). A final question asked schools for information about the number of years they had participated in the AmeriTowne program. It was intended that this information might be used during the data analysis portion of the study to aid in explaining possible differences between groups' data if necessary. However, of the fourteen schools notified and eventually observed, only three of the optional surveys were returned, therefore, this data was not ultimately utilized in the study.

Data Collection

In addition to qualitative observations, document analysis, artifact review, and interviews comprised additional sources of data for this study. The conceptual framework of Eisner's (1991, 2002) and Uhrmacher's (1991) dimensions of schooling (sometimes

referred to as the ecology of schooling) aided me when taking field notes during the observations. These dimensions: the intentional, the structural, the curricular, the pedagogical, and the aesthetic were also helpful in categorizing how the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation unfolded and allowed me to relate my own version of a typical day for the purposes of this study. While six dimensions exist, only five were applied to this study. The evaluative was not utilized.

The intentional dimension deals with the goals or aims that are formulated for a school/classroom, or in the case of this study, a program. This dimension addresses what the AmeriTowne program attempts to accomplish via experiential participation in the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation and is elaborated in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

The structural dimension attends to the organization of an educational experience. In this study, such things as how the day in Towne was organized or broken down, how time was spent by individuals and groups, how the environment was physically set up for learning were considered and are presented in the composites created for this study.

The curricular dimension of schooling deals with how content is addressed for learning and how students encounter it. For this study, learning opportunities provided by activities in Towne, group projects displayed in Towne and student-use materials utilized during the day were scrutinized as part of the curricular dimension and are discussed further in chapter four.

The fourth major dimension of schooling looked at was the pedagogical. This dimension addresses how students are taught, and in the case of this study, looked at how

adults and students interacted and what methods Towne employees took when instructing students during the Day in Towne simulation.

Finally, the aesthetic dimension considered ways in which students encounter aesthetically oriented aspects of learning during the Day in Towne simulation.

Intentional	Structural	Curricular	Pedagogical	Aesthetic
	Observations	Observations	Observations	Observations
Interviews with Vice President of programming				
Document Analysis/Artifact Review		Document Analysis/Artifact Review	Document Analysis/Artifact Review	
Interviews with AmeriTowne staff members		Interviews with AmeriTowne staff members	Interviews with AmeriTowne staff members	Interviews with AmeriTowne staff members

Table 1: Data Collection Related to Ecology of Schooling

Observations. Observations occurred over multiple days and included a different school each day. The fourteen schools observed represented nine school districts in the Denver metropolitan area. This provided a broad perspective and rich understanding of how the program supported learning for a wide variety of students. Fourteen schools were observed in total. Throughout the course of these observations, attention was paid to the activity of the students, AmeriTowne staff members, and teachers, as well as to the details of the physical environment and instructional materials.

During the observations, I wore an adhesive name tag on which I had handwritten the word *visitor* in an attempt to distinguish myself from the staff who wore plastic badges with the AmeriTowne logo and their name and different still from the teachers who wore adhesive tags with their name and the word *teacher* pre-printed in type on it. Parent volunteers generally wore adhesive tags with their names and the pre-printed typed words *school volunteer* on them. On several occasions, teachers asked me if I was *the researcher* they had been told would be on site, and at other times, chatted with me about their views on the program or offered unsolicited information about student groups or their schools. I was not formally introduced to students or volunteers and attempted to remain as unobtrusive as possible. I did not engage students at any time. My intention was to assume the role of a nonparticipant and generally that remained true; however, because of the nature of students and the fact that they had not previously visited this location, occasionally I was approached and needed to interact briefly with them. Most often this occurred when students mistakenly took me for an AmeriTowne staff member, asking a question about procedure or something to do with the general activities of the shop where they were working, and most frequently resulted in me letting them know that I was a visitor and referring the student(s) to an AmeriTowne staff member. Due to the inquisitiveness of the parent volunteers, I was also approached on various occasions and asked what I was doing, as many volunteers recognized that I was not working in the same manner as the staff, rather moving throughout the Towne, watching, and taking notes. On such occasions, I related the nature of my work and answered any questions the volunteers had. On several occasions the volunteers gave their unsolicited opinions about

how they felt in regard to what they saw occurring during the simulation. Informal conversations were also initiated by AmeriTowne staff members on occasions and often offered additional information pertaining to the study.

Neither video nor audio recording was utilized rather I observed those aspects easily viewed by the naked eye. I was able to position myself in a variety of locations including those within each of the shops in very close proximity to students and their activities, as well as in central spots located within the Towne Square such as on a park bench where I could take in the majority of the Towne at one time.

Each observation lasted approximately four hours and followed the students from the time they entered the Towne for their initial overview presentation by the AmeriTowne staff, through the set up, the running of Towne's day, the break for lunch, the afternoon Towne session, the closing ceremony, and subsequent clean up of the Towne. During the observations, an observation protocol was used to record handwritten notes. The protocol included the date, time, and duration of the observations. Additionally, it included sections for both descriptive notes as well as a section for reflective notes and/ or questions about these descriptions. There was an area for sketching settings and/or labeling, sometimes used to note proximity and/or locations. This format of note taking aided in the development of the descriptive, interpretive and thematic aspects of the Educational Criticism. After each observational session, I reviewed my notes, adding in any details and elaborating on the day's information through typing these notes. A daily summary of initial impressions and potential findings

was created through the assignment of preliminary codes to the data collected. The data analysis section of this document will outline this in further detail.

Interviews. Seidman (2006) recommends that researchers can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process through the experiences of the individuals involved. I utilized the multiple perspectives of the individuals involved in the Young AmeriTowne program by conducting interviews with them for this study. A semi-structured format allowed me to ask specific questions, while also allowing for additional sub-questions to be addressed if deemed they provided further insight and thus allowed the interview to follow a more organic course. I used these interviews as a source of data from the adult employees of the YACFE who consented for this study. These added to the observational data and provided information that would otherwise have not been uncovered.

I arranged a date with the Vice President of programming for interviewing the AmeriTowne staff members during their regular workday. In order to accommodate the center's busy schedule, this date fell during a week when no students were scheduled to visit. Because of this, not all staff members were working on the date of the interview; however, all AmeriTowne staff were included in the email invitation which was sent out by the Vice President of programming. The staff members were notified that I would be conducting optional interviews for anyone who was interested, and staff was invited to participate in either an individual interview, a group interview, or to answer interview questions via email that could be sent directly by me and responded to in a similar format. Interviewees had the opportunity to consent to or decline audio recording at the

beginning of the interview. Interviews were conducted in a private conference room located in the YACFE. Information gathered during these interviews aided in the triangulation process and added to the structural corroboration for this study.

One combined interview with two AmeriTowne staff members was conducted. Both consented to audio recording and the interview lasted for fifty minutes in total. This format was advantageous in collecting useful information about the insights those working for AmeriTowne saw in relation to content knowledge and skills, student autonomy and social learning, along with the dimensions of schooling, as part of the operational curriculum during the students' day in Towne. Additionally, it gave me information on the values the staff members held regarding the intentionality in the way they approached aspects of their pedagogy. The group format allowed for the interviewees to interact with each other and build off each other's thoughts or supply alternative perspectives.

Two additional interviews were also conducted with two other staff members who also consented to audio recording. Each of these was conducted separately and both of these individual interviews spanned approximately thirty minutes in length.

A semi-structured format using the same ten questions was employed for all four of the interviews and all focused on the staff members' roles during the day in Towne simulation, their experiences with the simulation, and other opinions or insights these adults had due to their role with the AmeriTowne program (see Appendix C). All staff members interviewed agreed to additional interviews at a later date if necessary, although ultimately I did not feel that follow up interviews were required for this study.

The Vice President of Programming at the YACFE was also interviewed regarding general and specific information about the AmeriTowne program, its intentions, history, and background information. He consented to recording, and this interview occurred in his office in the YACFE on a date preceding the interviews for the AmeriTowne staff members. A semi-structured format was employed allowing for flexibility of questioning where appropriate, and used five open-ended questions. The interview lasted approximately twenty minutes (Please see Appendix D).

Following all interviews, audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher and subsequently coded for data analysis purposes.

Document Analysis and Artifact Review. According to Eisner (1991) for an Educational Criticism, another important source of information about schools, classrooms, and educational programs comes from documents and artifacts. To this end, throughout the course of the study, I assessed documents that provided information about the program. Artifacts of importance for this study included environmental print such as posters in the Towne shops, visual announcements and artwork completed by students and displayed in the Towne on the simulation day, and radio announcements created by the students and broadcasted during the simulation. I was also provided with copies of the newspapers produced by the students each day. Additionally, video clips, commercials, and television broadcasts created by students while in Towne during the simulation were viewed during the lunch break on the same day of each simulation. Copies of curricular/instructional materials, lesson plans for student assignments, blank student workbooks, and teacher guides were provided by the YACFE and were also viewed. The

YACFE website, AmeriTowne training materials, and newsletters from YACFE were also considered as potential sources of useful information and analyzed for deeper meaning. Artifacts were used in conjunction with the other methods: interviews, and observations, and contributed to creating a “credible interpretation” (Eisner, 1991, p. 185).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research begins during the course of data collection (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing data, coding the data, condensing codes into themes, and finally, representing the data. The overall process of data analysis is inductive, moving gradually from specifics to generalities. In an Educational Criticism, data analysis begins the process of reconstructing that, which is perceived, therefore deepening understanding. For this study, data analysis was informed by the recommendations of Creswell (2007) and Eisner (1991, 2002). These strategies included daily review and summary of field notes, assignment of initial codes, and reduction of codes as well as the identification of patterns and themes.

For this study, data analysis occurred both concurrently to, as well as, at the completion of collection. Documents and artifacts were analyzed at multiple points throughout the collection process. I immersed myself in the data and used codes for themes that were reoccurring.

Data from all sources was coded first generally. I also remained open to data that did not fit within these sources to ensure that I did not miss anything of potential significance. I then analyzed further for emerging themes, categories, and subcategories.

Data Presentation

Researchers using Educational Criticism are encouraged to represent their data in multiple or varied forms (Eisner, 2002). Within the traditional written format there are often many variations. While the data presentation of Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism may be supported in various ways, it is grounded in richly developed descriptions that illuminate the themes in order to support the reader in fully understanding the complexities of the site and participants. For the purpose of this study, in Chapter Four, I have recreated a typical day in the life of the Towne through the use of composite vignettes compiled from the multiple observations completed at the AmeriTowne site. While student behavior and interactions varied somewhat depending on the group, the basic structure and schedule of the Day in Towne simulation followed each day was the same. The composites generated capture the typical activity of the Towne. I used direct quotes whenever possible, taken verbatim from my observational notes. Additionally, because of the large number of students participating in the simulation each day, coupled with the vast space that made up the Towne, composite sketches allowed me to capture the essence of a typical day while including specific details.

Limitations

Limitations are inherent in all research studies. Some potential limitations to this study included that all schools were coming from the same geographic region, and there was some overlap from several school districts but not from others. Additionally, because students prepare at school prior to their day at Towne, individual teacher's pedagogical preferences, personal styles and varying degrees of fidelity to the AmeriTowne curriculum might have contributed either positively, or negatively, to how students prepared for the program, which may in turn have affected the ways that students were ultimately able to participate in the Day in Towne simulation. And because I only observed the simulation portion of the program, I did not have any information about the way individual schools prepared their students for their respective day in Towne and relied on artifacts such as curriculum planners provided by the YACFE. Additionally, because students were not observed within their own classroom setting, this change of venue may have affected some students' general behavior and interactions either positively or negatively.

Potential Benefits of Study

Educational criticism is a method of research that seeks to improve the quality of education by examining and appraising complex settings and experiences (Eisner, 2002). The literature has revealed several different areas of consideration in relationship to ways that students may encounter learning and on environments that support learning as well as the development of new knowledge and skills. This study explores a unique experiential environment and employs several conceptual and theoretical lenses.

Implications and lessons learned in this study may become a catalyst for future study, or may inform the practice of policy makers, school leaders and educators working in the classroom. Chapter Four provides the description of the AmeriTowne program.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE YOUNG AMERITOWNE'S DAY IN TOWNE SIMULATION

Introduction

As previously stated in Chapter Three, one way to appraise an educational program is to apply Eisner's (1991, 2002) dimensions of schooling. For the purpose of this study, the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, and aesthetic dimensions were considered in relation to the AmeriTowne program. These dimensions were used as the lenses that helped to highlight the themes revealed through observations, interview, document analysis and artifact review. This chapter provides descriptions of the AmeriTowne program. Interpretation and evaluation are interwoven throughout the descriptions bringing together the first three aspects of Eisner's Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship methodology.

The first aspect, description, enables readers to visualize what a place or process is like (Eisner, 1991). It recognizes that sight often encompasses all the senses (Eisner, 1991). Descriptions in this chapter are focused on providing the reader with the opportunity for a vicarious experience within the Towne's setting. Sensorial descriptions are utilized to connect the reader with the activities during the Day in Towne simulation. The use of direct quotes aids in understanding the events that transpired and gives voice to the individuals participating in the Day in Towne simulation. Photographic

documentation is intended to supplement the narrative description, and provides further understanding of the uniqueness of this educational setting.

The role of interpretation, Eisner's second aspect of the Educational Criticism, is to help explain the meaning of what the researcher has observed and to put this information into context and aid the reader in understanding the potential consequences of the observed practices. This helps to provide reasons that account for what has been seen, answering the questions, "What does this situation mean to those involved?" and considers "How does this classroom operate?" At times the process raises additional questions, which contributes to the discussion of thematic, significance of the study, and suggestions for further research addressed in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

Finally, the evaluative aspect of an Educational Criticism is essential. Eisner (1991) states, "Unlike the so-called detached observer who, somehow, is capable of simply describing, educational critics have the task of appraising as well" (p. 99). In an Educational Criticism, the researcher must judge what they have seen, articulating the value to a broad audience in order to serve the ultimate purpose of tying it back to an educational scope. In this study, the evaluative component relies heavily on understanding the relationship between experiential education, situated learning, and contextualization for students' understanding and development of knowledge and skills. As with interpretation, evaluation is woven throughout the descriptions and is addressed through the identification of the match or mismatch between the program's intentions and the benefits offered by the simulation's activities and will be elaborated on again in Chapter Five.

As previously stated, this chapter offers a detailed description of the AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation. The description is divided into five sections. The first section, *Intentions*, describes the history of the Young AmeriTowne program and uses Eisner's intentional dimension of schooling to uncover the aims of the program as explained by the program's director. The second section, *You've Got to Let a Little Chaos Happen*, gives insight into the AmeriTowne program from the perspective of staff members who work there on a daily basis, through Eisner's intentional, pedagogical, and curricular dimensions. The third section, *The Young Americans Center*, describes the site. The fourth section, *The Contextualized Environment*, focuses on Eisner's structural aspect of schooling, and examines the physical environment as it pertains to the architectural elements of the setting, the furnishings and materials, as well as the overall Towne arrangement. The final section, *Towne Life*, again utilizes the structural element of how the day is scheduled, as well as adding in Eisner's pedagogical and curricular, and Uhrmacher's aesthetic aspects of schooling to address the operational curriculum. It relates a typical Towne day through composite vignettes that illuminate the experiences of children during their time in the Towne. The operational curriculum can be viewed as "the unique set of events that transpire within a classroom. It is what occurs between teachers and students and between students and students" (Eisner, 2002, p. 33). It is what occurs during teaching and learning, whether intended or not, and comprises the experiences and practices as they actually occurred. Meeting with members of the AmeriTowne staff helped me to clarify what I had seen during my numerous observations of the simulation. Their reflections helped shape my understanding of their

intentions as well as to understand the ways in which curriculum, the Towne's elements (structural and aesthetic), and pedagogy combined during the simulation. Chapter Five will discuss the findings gleaned from my study and will answer my research questions. Additionally, in Chapter Five I will present themes that emerged from my observations and descriptions provided here in this chapter.

Intentions

Eisner's intentional dimension (2002) investigates the goals of the educational endeavor. In order to understand the intentions of the AmeriTowne program, it is important to understand some aspects pertaining to the history of the Young Americans Center for Financial Education (YACFE).

In 1984, a prominent, local business man read about a group of local schoolchildren who were seeking a bank loan to start their own business venture for a class project. The group was struggling, and no one would help them. That is when he realized that society was doing our youth a disservice by not teaching them early about economics and our financial system, and he responded by creating a bank, *only* for young people, the first of its kind in the world (YACFE, 2014). The bank opened its doors in 1987 in Denver, Colorado. This bank was authentic: a state-chartered, FDIC insured institution where those under the age of twenty-one could learn financial responsibility and use banking services and products. Today, the bank has two branches which have the capacity to serve more than sixty thousand young people annually and since its inception has served more than seventy thousand bank customers and five hundred thousand nonprofit program participants (YACFE, 2014). The organization has specifically stated

intentions for the programming and services they provide. This can easily be seen near the entrance to the YACFE, where a plaque clearly describes the organization's mission: "To further the economic education of young people so they will be competent and knowledgeable in managing their financial affairs and may prosper in the free enterprise system."

While the Young American's Bank opened in 1987, the AmeriTowne program began in 1989 in response to the need for a way to educate youngsters about finances and economic principles. In order to learn more about the program's background and intentions, I interviewed several staff members working in various roles within the AmeriTowne program. In addition to the stated mission the founders of the YACFE have outlined, the AmeriTowne program also has its own specifically stated intentions. During an interview with Mr. Mark Williams,¹ the Vice President of Educational Programming for the YACFE, I asked him to tell me about what he knew of the history of the AmeriTowne program and what the original and current educational intentions were for it. Mr. Williams explained that it grew out of a need for supplemental educational programming to accompany the bank.

So originally there was kind of a community call for educational programming to go along with the bank, and so they went out and searched for a model that would be experiential, because that's big, that's a BIG part as far as the organization, is experiential education, which is why the bank was created to be real. They didn't want just a simulation, they wanted a real bank that kids could experience what it is

¹ For purpose of this dissertation and per IRB, all participants have been given a pseudonym.

like to have an account and all the things that go with that. So in that vane they were looking for different models throughout the country of an experiential program to go with the bank that either they could buy as a license or they could adapt. (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

According to him, at the time a handful of other similar programs were in existence elsewhere in the United States, but nothing really fit what he calls that “total immersion of actually buying and selling and having the position (job position)” that they were looking for in a program. So, originally, a license for a Junior Achievement (JA) program was purchased, and then adapted and enhanced prior to use to meet this program’s aims.

It is clear that one intention of the program is to bridge banking with learning about banking, finance, and economics, placing them in a larger world context. Here Mr. Williams also emphasized that another very important aspect of the program was, and continues to be, experiential education. The idea that students need to do more than just hear about financial concepts rather they need to participate in using them and to have meaningful interactions with banking and economic principles. Therefore, another intention of the program is to provide an experiential component to elementary aged students where they can put these ideas into practice and actually experience them in a concrete form. In Mr. Williams’ words

So the mission is really to provide students with an experiential opportunity within a free enterprise system so they know kind of both sides of the supply and demand model and they understand kind of good financial literacy habits like saving and managing a budget. And so what our hope for with Young

AmeriTowne specifically, is that they walk away understanding that you have to earn money, you have a job, there are different levels of jobs based on /off your responsibility, and you have a personal income, you will also work for a business and that business will have an income and that the way they get an income is by selling products or services. So they will understand as a team kind of that they have to work together to sell their products and services and then at the end of the experience they will have had to have managed their money throughout the experience so at the end they can see personally how did I do as a member of this economy but also as a member of a business team how did we do? – so they get both statements to be able to look at that and to see what it means to earn and what it means to save and to manage money. (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013

Intentions of teamwork, money management for individuals and groups, and responsibility are seen in Mr. Williams' statements above.

In order to accomplish the goals the YACFE desired, a group of business professionals, elementary school principals, teachers, professors, educational consultants, and community leaders joined together to create new curriculum and programming. The JA curriculum and ideas were enhanced to a point where they could call it something completely different (Young AmeriTowne) and drop the JA moniker. The founders believed this new programming would better meet the desired student understandings and learning outcomes which included creating a continuum that encompassed work to be done at school before the visit, the simulation in the Towne, and additional work to wrap

up that experience after the students' visit. Mr. Williams states the portion of the intentions:

So it would not only be the Day in Towne experience, where they go up and actually participate, so it was not only just a field trip but there was a whole curriculum to back it up to prepare the kids to interact in that space in the appropriate ways... or in a way that made sense so they knew what they were doing. (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

As previously stated, from the onset, the program intended to be multi-layered: to have components of curriculum taking place at the school and to have the simulation aspect of the curriculum. Mr. Williams shared with me that while always in existence, both of these components have become more "advanced" over time adding that the school based portions were "meant to provide some sort of introduction so the students always understood what they were supposed to be doing (during the simulation) and to give information for them about being 'an adult' so to speak in a small town type of situation" (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013). Through these comments, we can see that another intention of the program is to give students the experience of acting as an adult would, having adult type responsibilities to gain perspective into the future.

Throughout the years, another facet of the program has been to continually adapt the curriculum in order to remain relevant. Through further discussion, this intention came to the forefront: that while the program seeks to be experiential and cover free enterprise and financial topics, YACFE understands that the curriculum must overall also fit within the scope of what schools generally teach and that schools must see some value

to the program if they are to continue to access and use it. Specifically, Mr. Williams stated:

Some of the changes have really just adapted as the Core Content Standards and things like that have changed over the years and/or have been interpreted different by districts. That's something that we always have to keep our ear to the ground to make sure, so that the curriculum can be integrated into a teacher's lesson plan.

(Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

Coupled with this is the intention that he will continue to adapt the program to meet the needs of individual teachers in the field stating:

I believe it's important that the curriculum can be integrated into a teacher's lesson plan because if it can't, it's going to get thrown into the field trip budget and some field trip budgets get cut and then it (the AmeriTowne program) disappears. And so as long as it can, can be a full experience that is part of the lesson-a lesson plan or sequence, it is a lot more difficult for a school to give it up. And so that is very important and the only way we can do that effectively is to make sure that we are adapting it to those changes so it's still easy to-for any teacher to bring it into the classroom. (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

Here we can see that the program intends to be more than merely a one-day experience and has a history of striving to maintain relevance in the ever-changing educational landscape.

At one point during our meeting, Mr. Williams stated that while the program intends to give students a view into the economic system, he sees one benefit as giving many students a glimpse into their first experience with a job.

It's important to consider the environments these kids are going to be walking into when they're 16, 17, or 18 and they're getting their first job and they're buying and selling things and so they will know what commerce looks like. I think it's important we can give most of them their first experience with what it would be like having a job. (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

Today, the program's philosophy remains that you can reach children through experiential, relevant education and teach them vital financial skills they will need in both the present and the future (YACFE, 2014). The overall intentions of the program and its experiential emphasis has not changed, and it still aims to offer a way for fifth graders to gain experience with financial and economic concepts through the use of an experiential simulation and accompanying school-based lessons. The current site at the YACFE has now been in operation for nearly 14 years having moved from another location locally here in Denver. The AmeriTowne program advertises itself as a "Hands-on lesson in free enterprise."

Apart from the intentions of the program, Mr. Williams added, "I personally think we are just as successful if a student figures out they don't want to be an accountant as if they figure out that they do really enjoy that" (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013). This leads to the idea that different staff members may intend for students to receive different things from their experiences within the program, and at times, individuals

working in various positions within the AmeriTowne program may also bring forth their own unique intentions. Because of this, I wished to probe further with individuals who accompany students during the Day in Towne simulation. I conducted interviews to learn more about the ways in which staff members approached their roles within the simulation, considering their own intentions along with elements of pedagogy and curriculum.

You've Got To Let A Little Chaos Happen

In meeting with various staff members, it became evident that all staff I interviewed understood the explicit intentions as laid out by the YACFE, stating such elements as financial literacy and free enterprise, listing such things as banking procedures, gaining exposure to supply and demand, or advertising as playing an important role in the goals for the AmeriTowne simulation. This was also quite evident during my observations as the scholastic intentions of the program were documented as being well supported. While the AmeriTowne staff members were not asked explicitly about their own intentions during interviews, each spoke of additional aims they had, often focusing on specific merits they believe the simulation provides or ways they personally utilized the simulation toward obtaining a specific goal(s) for student(s) or through the ways they viewed their own roles in the simulation and in how they addressed pedagogical aspects.

For example, during one interview, staff member Jimmy MacClellan,² whose title is a Programs Assistant, continually mentioned the importance of relinquishing control to

² This is a pseudonym.

the students and empowering them saying, “I think we should give them the onus of power- you can’t say this is what you need to do, because again that’s like school – do A... you want them to figure out to do A and then B and whatever” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

Later in the interview he again mentioned the idea of the students having the control when he said,

The onus of power should be on the kids, you know what I mean, they should have the power, they should make the decisions. I think that’s a big deal because they get to find out stuff themselves. The kids learn things that I didn’t even think of dreaming to teach them like they get to learn things out of the day that I didn’t even think of going in that direction because THEY took it in a different direction or THEY were creative in a way. That’s what I like about it – the day IS a little bit of chaos, but it’s a little bit of controlled chaos so I like that they are able to kind of just do it however they decide to and see what happens. You’ve got to let a little chaos happen. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

While the program in general supports the idea of students having a certain level of autonomy, here we can see that for Jimmy, one important element of the day is that the children absolutely should drive both the activity and the decision making portions during the day and take ownership in it in a way that, as he says at one point, “empowers” them. To this he stated,

The kids feel empowered by the day too, because then it’s their day instead of someone else’s. So like when you see someone who takes responsibility and owns

the shop- ownership of the shop, it runs better and I think a lot of kids don't maybe get that from school. When they get that ownership they feel empowered. Like there's this $A=B$ versus just you do this A on random worksheet and it goes to... there? A pile? (Personal Communication August 6, 2013).

"The why to the question of *Why am I learning this?*" Barbara³ (another Programs Assistant) added, in reference to Jimmy's idea that student learning in Towne has a life connection whereas classroom learning sometimes does not appear to (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

"Yes, the WHY- like why am I filling out this worksheet? Here, you get to see the why" (Jimmy MacClellan, Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

Jimmy and Barbara see the simulation serving as a connection, an authentic form of creating relevance for skills and learning. Adding to this, Jimmy believes that the simulation often serves the purpose of meeting the needs of students who learn in alternative ways. While he referenced this above, additionally, he had this to say about the simulation:

It can be a strong learning mechanism for someone who doesn't learn traditionally, someone who needs that. When I see kids who are hands learners and like when they just dive into stuff and you can just see lightbulbs popping all day compared to the kids who don't it's like saying a definition of something in a different way- so like some people understand definition A and some people understand definition B better. We're the rare time when kids get to use definition

³ This is a pseudonym.

B because at school it's mostly definition A. We use a different tactic to learn and that works better for some people. The independence and the ability to dive in and touch things with your hands instead of having to learn about them through your ears. We are teaching the same things in different ways. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

Barbara concurred with Jimmy's thoughts adding,

I also think because it's not like school it kind of forces them to – it is different for them from school you know, they are kind of forced to make that connection with ok, this isn't school, it's a different kind of experience. There's a lot of kids who have succeeded in school, in the school environment because they are really good at following directions. Like a teacher tells them what to do- they do it very well and so they succeed, but in AmeriTowne while we do give directions there is also a lot of chance for them to explore and create and do things their own way. And a lot of kids just don't do that well. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

While some of the intentions were repeatedly eluded to as above, at times the intentions manifested in the form of staff members' values and personal experiences. For example, another Programs Assistant named Diane⁴ mentioned, "I think that it is like really crucial for kids when they're growing up, because some kids have this/those helicopter parents so they need the opportunity to be themselves away from mom and dad and do their own thing and take chances" (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). In

⁴This is a pseudonym.

this case, having independence and taking chances can be seen as intentions Diane supports during the students' day. Additionally, she mentioned that while taking chances is important for her to see, conversely she does not want students to experience undue anxiety or stress, stating,

If someone is stressing out so much about trying to do the job, I don't want the student to a) make it miserable to everybody else, and b) be miserable themselves. If I see kids getting worried, I'll go in and say 'hey, try this and let me know if it works and I can come back and check on you in fifteen minutes'. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

Later in the interview, she discussed what she believes her role during the Day in Towne is:

Playing the role of facilitator works really well with my personal philosophy and how learning should happen. I find it really nice to just watch the kids and if something gets out of hand or if they are about to break down in tears, then I will step in (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

This intention of allowing for student autonomy was evident in the approach that Diane, and the others, took when working with the children during the simulation. In fact, during the interviews and observations all of the staff members referred to themselves and their intended role in the simulation with some variation other than instructor or teacher.

Jimmy considers himself a "consultant".

Barbara views herself as a "facilitator or sometimes a coach, especially if kids need motivating".

Colleen,⁵ who works as a Programs Director, refers to her role as, “a resource” adding, “for the student when they need to get information” (Personal Communication, May 29, 2013).

At other times during the interviews, staff members very explicitly stated goals they had for students, for example, when Barbara had this to say, “I think that ultimately I hope that every group who comes here has fun.” Other staff members echoed Barbara’s ideal of fun being an important outcome for the day.

At one point during the interview Jimmy expressed, “Fun is a big aspect- it helps- I don’t know if it’s 100% necessary to have fun but, ultimately if they are having fun, and they are learning something along the way I hope that as well” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). While Diane remarked, “Because they are just here one day, we really do want to make it awesome for them” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). And Colleen related her desire for fun through a counter example when she noted,

There are some really great teachers out there who ya know, just sort of stop by, make sure they get a picture of the kids working but it’s not obtrusive, maybe they give some nice reminders or remarks. But every now and again there’s teachers who I mean, for me, I’m kind of like ‘this is this kid’s only day here and they’re probably not going to have a good time if you’re yelling at them about all of the spelling mistakes they are making.’ (Personal Communication, May 24, 2013)

Throughout the course of the interviews, many intentions came to the forefront. The above examples serve to highlight some of the staff members’ intentions in their own

⁵ This is a pseudonym.

words as taken from interviews. The following table summarizes the intentions of various staff members of the AmeriTowne program in addition to those explicitly set forth by the YACFE organization, focusing on three main categories of intentions: academic, social, and their own personal goals for students.

Name	Role at AmeriTowne	Intentions Gleaned from Interviews
Mark Williams	Vice President of Programming	Preparation for first job in workforce Possibility of making mistakes in an open environment and receiving immediate feedback Compare positive/ negative experiences and use these toward future decision making Be more than a field trip
Jimmy MacClellan	Programs Assistant	Students can make mistakes without severe consequences Students see the connection between what they are doing and the overall purpose/ goal Motivate and empower students Provide a realistic experience of what it is like to work with others Students have fun Provide an alternative to traditional school and book learning for students who don't normally get that Student ownership in the day /learning Students understand big concepts Everyone trust the uncertainty/chaos
Barbara Johnson	Programs Assistant	Students have a memorable experience Students have fun Explore, create and do things their own

		way Provide the link between what students are learning and why they are learning it Students appreciate the experience Students embrace the moment Students understand big concepts
Diane Roberts	Programs Assistant	Students are independent and take chances Students take ownership Students enjoy the day Students not experience undo anxiety Allow for whatever nugget of information any given student might take away as learning Everyone finds a fit for their personality Staff respond based off cognitive and human development
Colleen Anderson	Programs Director	Apply concepts of supply and demand Students are mainly self-reliant Mistakes are okay Everyone go with it- have fun

Table 2: AmeriTowne Staff Members Interviewed, Job Titles, and Intentions

How does the AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation provide opportunities for the type of experiences intended? One of the most important aspects is the practice of creating an environment of contextualization that supports individual and group learning. The program does this by attending to the physical, intellectual and social elements of the environment.

The following section provides detailed descriptions of the AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation. Eisner's (2002) structural, curricular, pedagogical,

and Uhrmacher's (1991) aesthetic dimensions of schooling were utilized to address the operational curriculum. The structural dimension attends to the organization of an educational experience. In this study, such things as how the day in Towne was organized or broken down, how time was spent by individuals and groups, how the environment was physically set up for learning were considered and are presented in the composites created. The curricular dimension of schooling deals with how content is addressed for learning and how students encounter it. For this study, learning opportunities provided by activities in Towne, group projects displayed in Towne, and student-use materials utilized during the day were scrutinized as part of the curricular dimension. The fourth major dimension I looked at was the pedagogical. This dimension addresses how students are taught and in the case of this study looked at how adults and students interacted and what methods Towne employees took when instructing students during the simulation. Finally, the aesthetic dimension considered ways in which students encounter aesthetically oriented aspects of learning during the Day in Towne simulation.

The Young Americans Center

Upon approaching the building, one would never know the gem it encompasses: located only blocks away from a major, upscale, shopping mall, the Young Americans Center for Financial Education's (YACFE) contemporary white, brick, and glass building blends in perfectly with the surrounding structures. It is flanked in the rear by a high-rise apartment complex, by urban office buildings on one side, and by newer walk up town homes across the street. This area of town is known generally for its affluence, and the YACFE's façade matches the area's reputation. I station my car in the parking lot and

begin the short walk through clean, well lit garage to the short staircase that brings me back outdoors to the front of the building. The well-kept lawn is greening, and the trees and flowers are beginning to bloom because it is springtime. I take the few steps and enter the double doors leading into the foyer. The YACFE serves multiple purposes: the first, as the home of the Young American's Bank, the first and only bank in the world created solely for people under the age of twenty-one. I can see the bank to my right as I enter. A mother and her child are in the process of a transaction. A youngster of about five years of age is standing on a built in stepstool speaking to a teller. She appears to be helping him to understand the paper she is handing him.

The receptionist the same young college student who I see every time I visit greets me. We chat for a few minutes as I make my nametag. I know the students have not arrived for the simulation yet having not seen any buses along the curb when I entered. She asks me if I know there would be some extra visitors in Towne today. She correctly expects I will be interested, but I tell her I did not, and she excitedly informs me that today is a big day as the representatives from the foundation will be there to present the year end checks to leaders of the recipient non-profit organizations.

I thank her, thrilled with this fortuitous news and excited about being able to witness this aspect of the program. Passing the large sculpture of a tree ornamented with dollar bills engraved with names, which stretches from floor to ceiling and acknowledges the donors that make the programs possible, I proceed to take the two flights of stairs to the second floor.

To the left is the Young International Towne and I can already see the staff there preparing for their students' arrival. I veer right at the elevator and enter through the double doors. Immediately I am transported to a whole new place: AmeriTowne.

The Contextualized Environment



Positioned around the green carpet of the square are the shops that make up the Towne. The pyramid shaped glass skylights above let in ample, natural light and along with the brick sidewalks in front of the shops create the sense that one is indeed outdoors. Today the sky is blue and some cottony looking clouds are visible through the glass above the Towne Square. The shops set along the perimeter and each corner is delineated



with a street sign. Much detail and work has been put into transforming the 5,000 square foot facility into the Towne. Again, I am impressed by such details as the large white pillars of the Towne Hall, the red-tiled tower marking the

College and the cloth awnings covering the entrances to shops such as the market. I have a few minutes to myself, and use it to stroll along the sidewalk, enjoying the serenity of the space. A staff member says, "Hi" and lets me know coffee is ready in the volunteer room if I'm interested. I thank her but decline preferring instead to spend a few more minutes enjoying the quiet and the surroundings. Even after many visits, I can appreciate the attention the creators have given to details such as the large clock on one end and the

street lamps positioned on two of the corners. Furnishings such as the mail drop box, park style trashcans, and the newspaper box from a large local paper add to both the charm and the functionality of the space. All together, these details represent a portrayal of a town square reminiscent of those that might be found in locations all across America. While the set up has been created for children, it is in no way play-like. The storefronts are real, constructed from glass and brick. The furnishings found within are not toys, nor replicas rather they are the tools of the trades they depict. As I stroll down Penny Lane, I take it all in: I start at the Bank where the counter is an actual teller station donated by a local bank, along with a large safe, and a banker's desk to be occupied later in the day by the Bank's Accountant. Passing the television station, a news desk emblazoned with a local station's logo sits prominently in front of a mural depicting various well-known spots across our city. I continue along to the corner of Banking Boulevard and Success Street, venturing into the Medical Center that contains an examination table as well as anatomical models for student learning and use. Further down the block, in a shop labeled "Containers", a variety of hammers, nails, sandpaper, vices, and other tools of the construction trade occupy a neatly arranged pegboard along the back wall.



I continue, passing the Snack Shop, with its lunch counter and tall, silver, spindle backed seats that are empty now but that I know will be occupied much of the rest of the

day. Past the Warehouse, the Utility Company and the Parcel Service sit empty but the uniform shirts hang ready to be donned. I enter into the Parts and Service Station that houses the front end of car that has been modified to be a learning tool for students. The metal shelving unit is ready for the day with the air filters, wiper blades and the like. They too will soon be ordered at the request of other shops who will find themselves unable to function efficiently until they remedy the vehicle problems they will encounter. All in all, my thoughts remain that the seventeen-business Towne is impressive, unique, and well thought out down to the minutiae (see Appendix E for a map of the Towne



Shops).

Towne Life

Whose Towne Is It? I make my way to one of the park benches positioned at the edge of the “lawn”. While I settle in readying myself for the day, I begin to hear some commotion: muffled voices become louder as they echo through the lobby and give way to a trample of footsteps on the stairs; Telltale signs that the students have arrived!



As the mass of students enters through the double doors, a variety of “Oohs!” and “Ahhs!” erupts.

A female staff member stands mid-square loudly requesting that the group “Find a place on the carpet.” “Do not go into your shop yet! Just bring your things and meet here

first!” While a few other staff members herd the group in, two parent volunteers can be heard speaking to one another.

“Isn’t this cool? This is really cool!” says the first woman.

“So realistic,” replies the other.

Little by little the students’ buzz and chatter lessens and the AmeriTowne staff member moves to the front of the Square, stationing herself in front of Towne Hall where a few props have been set up. The students have been gathered to receive an introduction. She begins, “Good morning everyone. I’m Colleen⁶ and I know you are probably *really* excited to be here today at Young AmeriTowne- who’s excited?”

Hands raise and shouts of “Meeee!” can be heard throughout the crowd.

“Great!” she continues. “So what we are going to do first is to review a couple of things here together that will help make our day in Towne a little better. So back at school I know you did some lessons. Who knows what this is?” she raises a rectangular poster-sized item from near her feet. It is a copy of a deposit slip that has been enlarged and mounted on foam-board. “You,” she says pointing to a boy in the front.

“It’s a deposit slip” he replies.

“Right! How many of you remembered your checkbooks today?” Did you fill those [deposit slips] out at school?” She is asking the students, but her eyes move toward the group of teachers who have come out of the volunteer room and positioned themselves near the side of the seated students. Amidst the shaking of the students’ heads and the answers of “Yes,” confirmed by the teachers’ similar responses, the staff member

⁶ Per IRB, pseudonyms are used for all staff and students.

continues. “Okay then... what are you going to do with your deposit slip?” She calls on a student who informs the group that they will take their paycheck and deposit slip to the bank on their break. “Right,” she says, “On your first break -- you are going to get two breaks today, but on your first one, the very first place you need to go is to the bank to use this (pointing to the deposit slip) and bring your paycheck too so you can deposit it into your account. Remember while you are here today everyone has an account at the bank. Now,” she continues, “If any of you didn’t fill out your deposit slip, that’s okay because I’m going to put this right here.” She moves about twenty feet over and positions the poster-board prominently on a ledge outside the bank. “Use that as an example if you need to fill out yours, okay, and I bet that the tellers could help you too if you need it, right tellers?” A couple of girls appear to nod their heads but other than that there is no auditory response immediately available. “Now, today when you are here you can use your debit card, and the cash you get back from your deposit you are going to do. I see a lot of you have your debit cards!” She is right most of the students are holding plastic Ziploc bags with checkbooks and debit cards. A few girls have purses in hand, and I know from experience that they have likely already packed these items within. “You can also write checks today and *some* shops in Towne here, like Towne Hall and the Medical Center will *only* take a check. But what should you be doing when you use a debit card or a check?”

“Write it in your book!” yells a student near the back.

“Exactly -- *record* it in your *register*.” She again picks up a foam-board created to show students what a few transactions in the register should look like. I know that

students should have already started this process with a few of the transactions that accompany lessons completed at school before this visit. Lessons pertaining to making a deposit into their savings account, receiving funds for participating in campaign work, and investing in a Certificate of Deposit, Stock, or Mutual fund also used the student register and the foam-board replica clearly shows these items. To the teachers, she inquires, “Do their registers look like this?”

Leaning forward one of the women scrutinizes it finally concluding, “Yah, I think so.”

“Good, good” replies Colleen looking rather relieved. In talking with staff members during interviews, one of the most challenging aspects of the day can arise when students aren’t adequately prepared when they come to the simulation. To me, Colleen’s response seems to parallel this idea. She continues, “So today when you buy something, when you use your checks or your debit card you should record it in your register. What about when you buy something with cash? Should you record *that* in your register?”

“Yeeessss”, is the resounding answer. Colleen then switches gears to quickly re-teach the students about the differences between using funds in your bank account and cash purchases not requiring anything else.

During the interviews, several members of the staff stressed the importance of students having an understanding the big concepts that drive the simulation. Coupled with this each spoke at one time or another about the uncertainty of each day, namely the fact that the staff would never know exactly how well prepared, or not, the group might be in regard to the overarching financial concepts the program supports. In Jimmy’s

words, “You really never know exactly what you’re gonna get, so when we figure out something needs to be addressed, in order for the day to work, it’s like ok, we reprioritize for the moment” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). I see that Colleen has done this and done this seamlessly.

Within a few minutes, the review has been completed and Colleen continues, “Who remembers what it is called when you spend more than you have to spend?”

“Overdue!” call out a tandom of students. “Close,” Colleen states,

Being *overdrawn*. In the real world you will be charged thirty or fifty dollars or even get in trouble with the law if you do it too much. So, you don’t want to do that today- keep track of what you spend in your register. Statements will be mailed back to school so you can check and see if you wind up in the negative, but really you should already know, if you are using your register.

As a group, they review the transaction poster example and a student asks what the letters DC stand for. Colleen tells her that it is how a person can indicate a debit card charge.

“Any other questions?” she inquires. Because there are none, she adds, “So now, we are going to go over what each shop will be selling today. I hear some of you *talking*, and I know you can’t wait, but...the sooner we finish *here* the sooner we can begin the part that you have all been waiting for...” She takes about five minutes reviewing the items for sale within each shop moving systematically in order around the Towne Square motioning to the location of each shop for the students as she explains. Items such as mechanical pencils, rubber balls, small foam glider kits, novelty chocolates, and plastic sunglasses are produced from a yellow gift box she is using to store these treasures. One-

by-one she explains briefly a bit about each shop, the items they will be selling, and gives a synopsis of the services these locations will provide to the Towne where applicable. I recall the conversation I had with Mr. Williams where he told me about one of the major differences of the AmeriTowne program in comparison to others similar to it. He said,

One change we originally made was to provide tangible items to the students instead of working from more symbolic means. Buying toys and drinks is expensive for us as a non-profit, but having those things that a fifth grader can say, ‘ I value’, that is very, very important in that decision making process of the free enterprise system, as opposed to looking through say, an IKEA catalogue, which could save us money, but a fifth grader doesn’t necessarily connect – why would I need a couch, or why would I buy a couch at twelve hundred dollars.

(Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

It appears that the items provided today are of real interest to students this age, and Colleen’s overview creates some excitement from the students.

“Whose townie is it today?” she inquires after introducing the last of the shops.

“OURS!” scream the students.

“Right!” A few more minutes pass with Colleen reviewing basic concepts like supply and demand and advertising strategies.

Remember you are the “adults” here today, so if you decide you want to lower your prices that’s your choice, and even if we [teachers and staff] know you might not make a profit, we’re not going to stop you. And just so you know, there are no

replacements of lost products today, because that's what happens in the real world.

The link to real world relevance is an important one, and Colleen's statements emphasize this. As previously stated, one of the program's intentions is to give students exposure to concepts in an authentic, experiential, and meaningful way.

She reminds them that it is, "Their decision throughout the day to decide if they want to change their investment," and to, "Visit the investment shop if they decide to do that."

I wonder if she has said this in order to bolster the Investment shop's attendance today. While I know that all students have in fact made an investment as part of their pre-visit curriculum, I can't help but think that most students, perhaps even many of the adults, do not fully grasp the concepts and nuances of investing, therefore making that shop less appealing to students. The shop can run with as few as three workers, which leads me to believe that while an important concept in the economic system, perhaps here it plays a lesser role than some of the others. I also remember Diane's interview comment about developmentalism,

Sometimes I wish that when planning the curriculum or even when considering the shops that we would think more about cognitive development and what the kids are going to be able to understand and grasp. What is possible, versus what they can really handle. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

Perhaps she is right and the idea of investing may be a bit above most of the students.

Colleen continues, "While you are here today, you will need to follow most of the same rules that you do at school. So that means no running, no chewing gum, no leaving the confines of the Towne- so you can't go out of this door here." She points to an area behind her "That's a fire exit," she continues, "and you can't leave those double doors there" she says indicating the doors the students entered through earlier. "Also no littering and here in Towne you can only eat here in the square or at the snack shop. If you buy a drink you can store it in your cubbie until lunch but you can't drink it in the shops."

"Who's our judge today?" she then asks. A boy raises his hand and she request he stand up. "Did you guys come up with some fun laws for today?"

"Yes," responds the newly identified judge.

"Could you remind everyone what those are?" Colleen inquires. "Nice and loud so everyone can hear you."

The judge reminds everyone of the laws that had been created and voted on back at school:

- When you exit out of the bank you must say, "Cha-Ching" and pull your fist down.
- Salute park benches when you walk in front of them.
- If you pass the radio station you must do the Harlem Shake or some other dance move you *can* do.
- Say, "I gotta hit the gym" after eating at the snack shop.

- When you come out of the bathroom you must announce loudly, “That felt good.”

“Does everybody understand those laws?” asks Colleen. “Ok guys, so now we are ready to go and get our shops ready.” Some students begin to stand but Colleen quickly adds, “Whoa! Wait just a minute... You are going to have 15 minutes.” She produces a laminated sheet from a stool nearby. “In your shop you will find one of these.” Flipping it over she says, “There are two sides. One says *Before Opening Towne*. This is the side that you will be using. You don’t have a lot of time, so go through this list and try to get everything done. Are you ready? Okay then...GO!”

As previously stated, supporting student autonomy is not only important as an element of experiential learning, but it also plays an important role in the intentions of the program and of individual staff members. While the students have not yet stepped foot in their shops, nor likely have any idea of what precisely they are to do, the program’s approach of giving students a scaffold through the use of tasks broken down and assigned to different shop positions encourages autonomy. Diane had this to say about it,

We get kids who are like 100% let me try this all the way to kids who won’t make a move without the help of an adult, so we’re trained to try to just get the kids going as much as possible on their own even when they don’t really know what to do, someone, one of the kids, will usually step up and figure it out.

(Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

The previous section described some of the physical elements of the Towne. The following section will highlight some of the ways that the physical environment allows

for students to show autonomy as individuals, as well as demonstrating the ways that the environment supports autonomous group functioning with the students not requiring much support from adults.

Hey! Look at me! Chatter explodes as the students spring from their seats, scurrying like ants in a variety of directions. The Towne square is vacant once again save the lone backpack that some student has forgotten in his excitement. Each shop will now begin the task of reviewing the checklist Colleen shared, readying itself for opening.

Within the stores, students can be seen placing personal belongings into small glass cubbies, lockers, and shelves depending on the location. Soon students begin leaving their shops on a multitude of errands.



A young man who appears to have Down Syndrome exits the warehouse with a small, flatbed, dolly. On it three, clear, lidded totes have been stacked. Each one is labeled with a shop's name. Another student accompanies him, and they make their way diagonally across the green of the square toward the Radio Station. They are making the morning supply deliveries to various locations. About ten feet behind them a teacher's aide follows.

In addition to support staff like this woman, a few of the shops have parent volunteers who have accompanied the students on their trip today. They were prepped

upon arrival by the staff as to what their assignments will be and given suggestions for how to best help the students during the simulation today. Perhaps this introduction has encouraged her to let this young man have some independence, or maybe she takes on an observer role all the time including at school. Either way I am happy to see that all students are being encouraged to show autonomy while here in Towne today. I assume that she will trail behind him most of the day, allowing students to support him as needed and only stepping in if she is surely needed. I think back to an interview with the AmeriTowne staff, where I was told in regard to parent volunteers, that, “Sometimes adults can just really get in the way, while others are just there to ask questions and really help kids to keep going” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). I hope that those here today will be of the latter category.

Not far behind the boys I see another girl leave the warehouse with a delivery to the market. She enters and announces, “Delivery!” and offers the clear bin of products with outstretched arms. The market staff looks unaware that they should be expecting anything, or perhaps they are uncertain just what to do. One sales person appeals to the adult volunteer with a look of confusion. The volunteer mouths the words *thank you* and gestures in suggestion to the student indicating that he should take the bin. The student follows suit and says “Thank you”, accepting the shipment on behalf of the shop.

At the Radio Station the students work together to check the volume of the loudspeaker system. One boy stands in the carpeted area of the square giving thumbs up or thumbs down signals to let the disc jockey know if he can be heard. Once they believe the volume is good, the boy indicates as such with an “okay” signal of his hand.

At this point I leave my spot on the bench deciding to get closer to the students' actions. I enter the Container Shop where I notice all students within have already put on white hardhats. A girl writes "R.B. Containers

We Make It, You Buy It" with a dry erase marker on a large wipe board near the shop's front door. I am not sure what the R or the B stand for but guess they might be initials for



students' names. Just yards away, two male students stand reading from a chart near the wall. It is a How-To for assembling cardboard briefcases with handles complete with photos and arrows to show placement. This material, I assume, is meant to facilitate the process and support students in being independent in lieu of needing human assistance to complete this task. Near the back of the store Jimmy, a staff member is working with three students whose job title is "Assembler". In addition to the hard hats, they are wearing plastic safety glasses and have placed tool belts around their waists. Jimmy is showing the students what each pre-cut piece of lumber will be used for during their building task today. He shows them where they can find the nails and how to set them, overviews the various tools and discusses safety with the hammer.

"You must wear your glasses when you are using the hammer, but you can take them off now if you want" he instructs. Every student is engaged in something and the two boys, after counting the inventory and signing a form for a shipment of cardboard, have begun to construct their first of the many cardboard briefcases they will build and sell today.

Just outside, another warehouse member has left with her cart and boxes. She makes her way to the Investment Center with a shipment of necklaces and erasers with dollar bills and coins printed on them. I watch her but don't follow, instead making my way next door to the Television Station. Outside a group of six children are receiving a lesson from Colleen on how to use the video recorder. Once she finishes with her instructions, she leaves and the students begin tinkering and experimenting with the device. The "Camera Crew" moves the tripod testing various locations in the square while the "Photojournalists" respond to the crew's remarks about how to adjust themselves so they will be in frame. Back in the shop, the manager and another student discuss their plan for the taping of the commercials they have been tasked with completing during the morning Towne session. They have created a checklist on the wipe-board typically used for advertising. They have set it up as a T-chart with one side labeled DONE and the other side reads NEED TO DO.

A short, brown haired girl leaves the Medical Center wearing doctor's scrubs. They are much too long, and she has rolled the bottoms both at the waist and from the hems at the legs. She is wearing a surgical style mask around her neck. In her hand are a few laminated, index-sized cards. I watch as she takes them to several different shops, placing them each into a like-sized plastic sleeve on the wall near each entrance. Further inspection reveals that they are Employee Health and Safety Tips from the staff at the Medical Center. Such things as: "Be careful of low hanging power cords or those on the floor that can be a tripping hazard" are placed within each shop. After several minutes a

female employee of the television station approaches the tiny girl who by now has been joined by another girl wearing a doctor's jacket and surgical hairnet.

The television employee alerts the girls, "You gave us one that says Bank."

"Oh no!" responds one of the girls, "We did it all wrong!" They hurry off to retrace their steps and begin redistributing the Health and Safety Tips once again. This time they accurately get the college its tip: "Always wear your bike helmet when riding your bike, even on campus," and the market receives: "If you drop something made of glass and it breaks, don't pick up the pieces without wearing work gloves. The glass might be sharp and cut your hands." The girls continue making their rounds, and I note that the utility company is also dropping off Easy Energy Saving Tips using a similar method and format. I watch as a boy bedecked in a red, baseball cap and tan work shirt carefully places "Repair leaky faucets. One drop per second from a faucet wastes up to 400 gallons a year. Not only is water being wasted but so is the energy used to heat it" into a plastic sleeve at the snack shop.

Within each shop, each group of students has written out goals for their time here in Towne. Students have tacked these sheets on the bulletin board as a way to remind themselves of some of their values for the day. Thoughts such as:

- Share ideas with each other and follow job responsibilities
- To be a team at the end of the day
- Everyone is heard and listened to
- We should be responsible and get along equally

Show that students value the ideas of fairness and equity in the work place, supporting the social aspect of the simulation, while goals such as

- Have news that people actually will watch
- Make music fun to listen to and easy to hear
- Get good stories for the paper (very interesting)

Demonstrate that students understand the authentic aspects and purposes of their work here in Towne today.

I wander through the Towne and note students referencing materials in their respective stores. The Photographer in the newspaper is using the notes left for him about good camera usage for taking successful pictures while the Editor is reviewing a checklist of responsibilities that will lessen the chance for errors and enable the paper to be published on time. The Accountant at the paper is viewing a laminated card that has been left on her desk. It reads Good morning *Jackie* and has been filled in with marker especially for her that day. She begins to review the steps for what to do with business checks that will begin to arrive and how to use them throughout the day to create a



business deposit for the bank, and how to complete the daunting task of writing business checks to every business in Towne paying for group health insurance, advertisements, and the like.

I find myself thoroughly impressed by the way the environment lends itself to constructivist practices. Students are able to figure out what they are to be doing, even though they have never been here before, due in large part to the scaffolds created that allow for students to proceed

autonomously. These scaffolds: photos, checklists, written step-by step directions work in harmony with the adult employees to create cogs in the system, with each piece advancing the “machine” a bit further. The activities students have been assigned are authentic and appear to help them understand the link between the instructional materials, the environment and the human interactions related to them, providing a sort of motivation. Students require interpersonal skills to work together and must rely on both academic knowledge and background experience to complete some of the tasks they have been assigned. As Jimmy had mentioned during his interview,

Kids, sometimes when they are doing schoolwork, they don’t feel like it has a purpose, like they have a goal and a purpose that motivates them. But here, this motivates them better, it makes sense. It’s not just sitting there or doing mindless work in their minds. It is like, someone will really suffer if I don’t help. There’s something on the line so to speak. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

The students working with the video recording equipment appear to be having trouble. I move a bit closer and watch for a few minutes as they play back some of the trial footage they have created so far this morning. “There’s no sound! What!?” exclaims one of the girls in the group. The remaining five hunker around the camera determining that she is correct. There is no sound. One boy leaves the group and heads inside the television station. He returns and has somehow procured some duct tape. The group begins to use it to tape one of the camera’s cords to the top of the device. Once well wrapped, they test it again to no avail. They decide to send one of the boys to track down an AmeriTowne staff member, Robert, and they both return shortly.

“What’s goin’ on?” asks Robert.

One of the girls recounts that there was no sound and explains that they have taped the wire because it must have been “shorting out”.

“Actually,” says Robert, “This is the problem.” He removes the duct tape and shows the group that they have plugged the cord into the wrong port.

“Ooohhh!” responds one of the boys simultaneously slapping himself in the forehead as if to say, *duh*.

“So are we good then?” inquires Robert.

“Yah,” responds the group and Robert leaves once again to go be of help elsewhere, I assume.

Next door Colleen is prepping the Towne Hall staff for their duties when the Towne opens. She reviews how the official ceremony will transpire and answers the students’ questions. Once she leaves, I hear one police officer, a boy, ask another female officer, “Do I need to take an oath? I don’t want to take an oath.” He looks visibly distressed and the girl softly pats him on the back but offers no other words.

I make my way to the corner of Towne where inside the Snack Shop two students are counting their inventory of cups that have been delivered by the warehouse. This is the number of drinks they can sell and serve during this morning’s Towne session. A girl has just finished putting on her visor and apron saying, “Hey Shannon! Look at me!” as she spins around to show it off. Clearly she is happy with the attire that has been provided for her position as a Sales Clerk. In the corner of the shop, the Accountant is working independently while in the opposite corner another student is setting up the shop’s

website using a computer. Jimmy stands on watching the students but is not involved in any of the processes occurring around him other than to eventually call the students



around him to stress the importance of wearing the plastic gloves provided and of using napkins when serving the cookies. “I don’t care if you have to use a whole box of gloves today,” he says.

“Is there a health inspector?” asks one student. “Not today,” replies Jimmy, “But we still need to act like there is one.”

A variety of other students move with purpose completing the tasks they have been assigned. Included in this are the delivery of each shop’s Group Medical Insurance applications to the Medical Center, upon which students have rated their own health as good, fair or poor, occasionally adding in such pertinent details as have asthma or wearing cast- I broke my arm. Shops’ advertisements are being dropped into the mailboxes at the Newspaper and Radio Stations while students toting business license applications make their way to the Towne Hall.



The Bank submits an Intent to Donate Profit form to the Community Relations Director indicating that if they are able to, they wish to donate \$20.00 of their profit to the Ronald McDonald House.

Students now sport a wide array of uniforms including, aprons, hats, and shirts and several students have mis-buttoned them or can be seen with collars askew but none of them seem to care. One girl at the warehouse has decided to personalize her wardrobe by taking the industrial looking button up and tying the ends in a bow in front unbuttoning the top few buttons and tucking in the collar to make what now appears as a v-neck.

At the Sign and Print shop, a group of students discuss options for advertising their products for sale. After a collaborative discussion, they decide to place one of each item on the front table near the entrance with a plan to make a sign for each with the



name of the product and the price. Whereas most other shops also place the product inventory in the front, this particular group of students, decide to keep the product stock at their work stations for efficiency reasons

with one girl suggesting that way they, “Wouldn’t have to get up.” Another boy suggests that if they each had some of all the products, both magic ink and personal sign order forms that they could “Check and see if the customer might buy both”. He seems to be thinking along the lines of creating a situation of up-sale. On the wipe board a student writes Prices with a heart above the *i* instead of a dot. Costom Signs [custom] \$2 and Magic Ink \$3. Get Yours!

Meanwhile, the group working at the Investment Center is not happy with the shipment they have received from the Warehouse and suggest the idea of seeing if they

can get an equal number of each type of eraser to sell. After discussing it, they select one student to go and speak with the other store's manager.

In various corners of the Towne, staff members have begun training students on important aspects of their job roles. At the Parts and Service shop, students receive instruction and modeling on how to use the computer jump drives provided to determine what is wrong with the Towne's vehicles and where to place completed jobs versus those still needing repairs. Next door at the Market I see a staff member training students on



how to use the debit card system and generate a receipt. At the Bank, tellers are receiving information on the importance of endorsements and the correct way to return customers their cash back from the deposits. They

practice counting this aloud while laying it out in the counter in front of them.

As the children and adults continue about their business, a loudspeaker announcement from the Radio Station suddenly booms throughout the Towne. "May I have your attention please...it is now time for the Opening Ceremony. Please stop what you are doing and come to the Towne Square".

Each of us has our own role, and each role is important. Students emerge from the shops and I see some appear in clusters, while some are still putting on uniforms as they emerge, and other students come running. Within moments they have found places on the carpet in anticipation of what will happen next. The Mayor and the Judge who

have been joined by the Towne's police force for the day stand together front and center with Colleen close by. The TV crew only yards away from them ready themselves to catch all the action. The mayor has begun to spontaneously give a mayoral type wave, moving his hand slowly back and forth smiling all the while. Students in the crowd wave eagerly back at him. Indeed, he does look the part. He has come today wearing a three-piece suit and red tie, and looks quite sharp in the trademark red, white, and blue top-hat provided for him today by AmeriTowne.

The television reporting crew appears to have some pre-ceremony nerves, as evidenced by some silly giggling between the girls, who, with hands covering their mouths, are whispering. The girls seem to have an image of what newscasters generally look like, as they have come today dressed in their skirts and high heels, with one of the girls wearing a child sized blazer. At once, the camera crew begins a countdown. With a hand high above his head, a boy uses his fingers dramatically showing five, four, three, two and one. He points quickly at the girls with the microphones. "Hello AmeriTowne citizens!" announces one girl reporter enthusiastically.

I'm Tiffany Walters from *Chatter Box News* where our slogan is *We've got too much to say so we always give you your news 24-7!* We're here with today's *TV Top Topics*. It's a beautiful day today and I'm here with my news crew for the Opening Ceremony. We are joined today by our Mayor, Seamus Smith and Shawn Spence, our Judge. Let's get started!

The crew pans the camera toward Colleen who is now standing next to the Judge already wearing his black robe. A hush falls over the crowd as Colleen begins reading

from a laminated script card, “Please raise your right hand and repeat after me. I... state your name...”

“I Shawn Spence,” repeats the Judge proudly.

“Do solemnly swear,” she continues.

“Do solemnly swear,” he repeats.

“To take this obligation freely,” says Colleen.

“To take this obligation freely,” the Judge mirrors.

“I will respect the rights of all individuals, and will act with honesty, courtesy and regard for the welfare of others,” concludes Colleen.

Judge Shawn follows suit, repeating each syllable with perfection.

Colleen gestures for the students to begin clapping and they readily oblige. A few cheers and “Yahs!” are peppered in for good measure.

Now the newly appointed Judge turns to the mayor who stands next to him at the ready. Reading from his laminated script card, the Judge requests, “Please raise *your* right hand and repeat after me. I, state your name...”

The mayor raises his hand and says, “I, Seamus Smith.”

“Do solemnly swear,” Judge Shawn continues.

“Do solemnly swear,” repeats Mayor Seamus.

“To take this obligation freely.”

“To take this obligation freely,” continues the Mayor.

“To accept my duties and to always strive,” states the Judge.

“To accept my duties and to always strive,” echoes the mayor.

“To honor this oath...”

“To honor this oath...”

“In my service as mayor,” concludes Judge Spence.

“In MY service as MAYOR,” Seamus finishes loudly.

Again a wave of applause fills the air and the newly appointed mayor makes a slight bow to the crowd. He then turns to the group of five officers festooned in navy blue uniform shirts and navy hats with shiny black brims above which a badge had been placed. “Please raise your right hands and repeat after me. I, state your names...” The officers, right hands raised at ninety degree angles reply, but the line comes out as a jumble, “I...Mike, Pa...Sydney, Fra...”

“Do solemnly swear,” instructs the Mayor.

“Do solemnly swear...” the three state in unison this time.

“That I will defend and enforce the law,” states the Mayor.

“That I will defend and enforce the law,” the officers chorale.

“And to act at all times to the best of my ability to uphold the honor of the police profession,” which in turn is slowly echoed back by the students-turned-officers.

I notice that the boy who previously seemed so concerned about the oath did fine during this exercise but did choose to stand slightly at the back of the others. I wonder if he enjoys the attention after all or if the fact that others were with him has made the situation more tolerable or possibly less risky. Perhaps he imagined he would be by himself speaking to the whole group.

The swearing in of officers is followed by a mayoral speech. Mayor Seamus steps up to the microphone, which has been placed into a stand by Tiffany, the reporter. Once ready, he produces a folded loose-leaf sheet from his front pants pocket. It is his speech, written ahead of time and likely reviewed by his teacher back at school before today. He opens it and begins,

Welcome ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, to the first opening ceremony of Young AmeriTowne. Thanks for electing me. Students, teachers, parents, honored guests, we have worked hard. We have learned about economics and government and talked about time management.

He continues to highlight some of the features of the Towne's shops adding,

We have all the things a successful and profitable town needs. We are here to have a great time, and act as adults do by having adult responsibilities. With positivity and hard work today, we can turn this town upside down! Cooperation, respect, and teamwork will equal success. Just like in real life, each of us have our own role, and each role is important.

He urges the "citizens" to be productive and reminds them "to be charitable if they can".

He asks for a round of applause for the teachers, for giving them this "awesome opportunity". "I pledge to keep AmeriTowne running smoothly. If there are any issues that you feel need my attention, please stop by Towne Hall and see me." Once he has finished his speech, he refolds it placing it once again into his pocket. Colleen has appeared from behind him, handing over a pair of two foot long, red handled scissors, which have in turn produced quite a lot of laughter from the crowd. The mayor takes the

gigantic item and cuts the blue crepe paper streamer that has been tied across the pillars of Towne Hall. Once the ribbon has been sliced, he hoists the scissors above his head



with both hands to the whoops, whistles and cheers of the citizens. “The town is now *OPEN*- let’s go get to work!”

It’s a great day at AmeriTowne. The students disperse from the square disappearing once again into their shops. The Radio Station has begun to play *Funky Town* by Lipps Inc. and it can be heard clearly throughout the Towne. I wonder if the students selected this, or if it was a suggestion by teachers, parents, or even AmeriTowne staff. Either way, it certainly is an appropriate homage to start the students’ day and lends an air of festiveness to the scene as evidenced by a few students who begin to groove to the music in various locations. A student skips by me, and no police officers are on scene yet to stop her but do appear shortly afterward to make their presence known on the lawn. Two of the officers stand together trying to figure out the ticket forms they have on their small, metal clipboards. “I know, I couldn’t figure it out either, but she (the girl points toward where Colleen is) said this is where we write what we saw them do” and pointing to a different line continues “and here is where we put the law they broke. She said we can use the numbers from the board” (pointing toward the wipe board at the Towne Hall with the laws listed with numbers). The student-to-student teaching was succinct and effective and the male officer goes off to stand watch in another area of the square.

Other students who have been assigned this first timeframe for a break are out and about going to the bank as instructed or some simply begin to shop around the

Towne. Some appear to know exactly what they want to do, buy and see, and cut directly across the square, while others seem a bit more particular and appear to be giving much consideration. I watch as one boy walks the entire perimeter of the sidewalk, looking carefully at each location's offerings before finally entering a shop to make a purchase.

Near me a student wearing a pink polo shirt with the Investment Center logo approaches Colleen. He wants to know what to do with an investment application with no last name on it. Apparently he needs to file them, so isn't sure what to do in this situation. She asks if he knows if there is more than one person with that first name. He thinks for a minute and decides there are two possible students, adding, "If it's Mike M., he's a police officer!" I take this to mean that he believes this student should have been more responsible since his job here in Towne would indicate as such and so is surprised by that possibility. Colleen asks him what he might do and the student decides he can check with the two students to see if it is theirs. She reminds him not to take too long before getting back to his shop and recommends that if he cannot find the students quickly to simply file it by first name in this case. The investment advisor leaves to pursue his search.



Elsewhere I see friends popping in to say hello to other friends, or to wave at them from the doorway of their stores. A couple of girls have met up and are walking around occasionally chatting and visiting with others who are working. "It's a great day at AmeriTowne," announces the Radio Disk Jockey, "I'm DJ Money Maker," then continues with, "Next up is Rock You Like a Hurricane. Richard this song's got your name on it." During pre-towne set up, I had seen that the Radio

Station (who named themselves Music Mania) was advertising via a written sign they created on their wipe board: Requests-\$2 depending on the song but \$1 for songs not yet played today. I wonder how much Richard has paid for this particular song, definitely an oldie. I also believe I know who DJ Money Maker must be, having seen a boy enter this morning wearing a massive, plastic dollar-sign necklace and side-cocked ball cap.

A Police Officer passes in front of me greeting each student he passes with a cordial, “Good morning.”

“Officer,” responds one girl.

Off to the side of the square two girls dressed in light blue hospital scrubs quickly push a wheelchair. “Woowoowoo!” they are



calling. The back of the wheelchair has been draped with a laminated sheet identifying it as the AMBULANCE along with a Red Cross symbol. The girls are en route to pick up a sick patient somewhere in the Towne. They request help from one of the police officers to get through a mass of students in front of the bank. The girls could have easily gone around the group, but have chosen instead to ask the officer to separate students so they can remain on the brick sidewalk. Both arms stretched wide, he instructs the children to, “Back up! Let the ambulance through!” and the girls proceed.

I can take whoever’s next. The very long line is clearly visible from my location on the park bench. It begins to stretch past the brick of the sidewalk and onto the Towne Greene. At first, it is orderly, but within yards becomes more of a mass with students forming a line that is three abreast or sometimes even four wide. I recall Barbara telling

me that for many kids, especially at the beginning of the day, that “It’s just a lot to take in,” and Jimmy concurring with her “Their little minds are blown. It’s different for them and for some it’s hard to adjust.” Considering this, I am curious to see what is happening and how the students inside the bank are handling this busy rush. I make my way closer, at first observing the students in line. “I thought this would be like real, but not real like *this*,” says a boy cocking his head up slightly as if to use his chin to point to the group in front of him. He is talking to another boy waiting next to him. His remarks seem to indicate that he is not happy with waiting in the line and perhaps that he’s experienced this at a bank before? The line is moving, albeit a bit slowly, and in fairness to the students working at the bank, it is pretty long. There are currently twelve students waiting and three tellers are working. Within about two minutes the speed visibly picks up. I have made my way inside the bank and stand off to the left of the line where I will not be in the flow of traffic but can easily watch the students interact. A student who has already been helped makes her way to the exit and completes the *cha-ching* sound and movement per the student created law.

Inside, the bank president is finishing writing a list on the large wipe board to the right of the line. He has taken his tie and flipped it over his right shoulder and is using a dry erase marker. At the top of the board in large lettering he has written: GET YOUR MOOLA. Underneath of this he has created some simple steps for the tellers:

1. Ask customer to endorse check.
2. Take deposit slip.
3. Count money.

4. Thank customer.

5. File the check.

I think this is a great idea and shows good problem solving skills. I think it would have helped smooth out this initial rush, and wonder if he will explicitly tell the other students about it once they have a free moment, or perhaps if he has already mentioned to them that he will be writing one. Maybe they decided this earlier and he is just now getting to it. Glancing at the line, I see that a Pilot in his flight shirt and hat is next up, with paycheck in hand. He stands patiently next to a sign typical to those found in banks all over the country. It reads "Please Wait Here for the Next Available Teller" and has been placed about five feet out from the counters. It is clearly intended to help students form the line. It is working because once students reach this point, they have separated themselves one to each side of the divider and are waiting in an orderly fashion.

The Teller at the end raises her hand to indicate that she can take the next person in line and the Pilot makes his way to her station. She takes his papers and counts money to herself placing it in a neat stack and hands it to him. She issues him a receipt and says, "Thanks."

To the left of her an enthusiastic Teller calls out, "I can take you right here- I can take whoever's next! Hi! How are you?" she greets her new customer. "Can I have you sign the back right there, please?" she requests while handing a pen over to the customer and pointing to the endorsement area on the check. "Do you have your deposit slip?" she asks and the student produces it. She scans the model deposit slip taped to the counter in front of her comparing the accuracy of it to the one the customer has given her. Apparently she

likes what she sees. She gets the cash back and counts it aloud to the customer creating a fan looking shape with the bills on the counter. “Here is your fifteen dollars, and please have a nice day.” She hands him a receipt then produces a clear shoebox from underneath her station. Within I see an assortment of colorful ballpoint pens and lollipops and she asks the customer, “Ya want one?”

“How much are they?” he asks.

“Free!” she seems pleased to offer this to him.

“What?” he asks, clearly confused.

She goes into a brief spiel recounting that her “High school cousin had a banquet the other week ago and these were left over so they gave them to me.” While I believe this is a clever and thoughtful gesture, I now think I understand where the possible hold up in the line may have begun. He finds a green, plastic click-top pen says, “Thanks” and leaves. The teller begins speaking aloud seemingly to her counterparts. “Hey guys, don’t forget we have these- I’m just gonna put this here for all of us.” She finds a space on the counter between she and one other teller and places the shoebox atop the short divider separating the stations. As if she’s had a second thought, she grabs a handful of the gifts and lays it on the partition between she and the teller on the opposite side. I suppose she is trying to be fair and be sure everyone gets some.

I watch a few more transactions, which have become noticeably more smooth and quick. The line is nearly gone. The girls are doing a wonderful job chatting with the customers and getting their deposits and cash. Colleen appears and approaches the line, addressing one of the two remaining girls. “Oceana, did you forget something in your

shop?” Not producing the desired response, the staff member continues, “Why don’t you go check the bulletin board.” To which Oceana realizes, “Ohhhh, my paycheck.” She hustles away and returns within a minute, just in time for her turn with the teller.

A worker from *Go Pro Utility* has arrived to do some work. He walks around the back commenting, “Excuse me sir” to a working employee, and opens a three ring notebook he is carrying. After determining where to find the location for his job, produces a plastic tube from his tool caddy



trading it for the one within the bank. He finds a Fleet Technician Form, then begins filling it out on his clipboard. Scanning the room, he writes Key Bank under the space for type of business, instead of *The Rusty Penny* (bank name today) or even simply bank, mistaking the corporate sponsor for the company name. Under the area that says task, he scribbles in the words *old hose* and under technician’s name writes Jon then he signs Jonathan Huseman underneath of the signature line. He approaches the accountant leaving the form and telling him that he will, “Have to mail the payment by this afternoon.” He then leaves.

The bank’s accountant gets up from his desk and approaches the bank President. “Mr. Jones, is it ok if I go and deliver these?” I find it amusing that the one boy is referring to his peer as *Mr. Jones* because he is the boss today. Mr. Jones okays this task and the accountant sets off to deliver the papers around Towne. Closer inspection reveals that they are business bank loan forms that each shop will be required to pay off by the

end of the day with proceeds from their sales. I read: Loan Amount _____ + 10% interest _____ = balance due _____ and each requires the signature of the bank president.

Throughout the commotion and the previous busy minutes, a parent volunteer and a staff member have stood near the back of the bank watching all the goings on. I am pleased to see that they have chosen not to intervene rather to let the students figure things out on their own. I imagine the next round of breaks and the ensuing rush to the bank will go even more smoothly.

The Cha-Cha slide can be heard playing in Towne, and one of the tellers claps along now that she is customer free. Since Colleen has been assigned to the bank today, she uses these few minutes of down time to give a quick primer on how to file the deposit slips numerically, so that the boy with the data entry position can use them efficiently for his computer task today. I decide to exit and head out to see what is happening in the other shops.

Next door at *Blue Sky University*, as students have named the College, I see the manager retrieve a jump drive hanging from a clear pouch that has been placed over a picture of a parking lot. The laminated card on it reads: "Athletic bus needs repairs." "I'll be right back!" she calls to the others inside and I watch her walk to the Parts and Service shop on the corner and drop it off near the front of the shop before returning. A few students sit at computer cubicles wearing headphones, progressing through different animated presentations. On the wall is a matrix outlining various job fields and listing positions commonly found within and clearly showing education necessary for these jobs

along with possible expected salaries once completed. It gives a wide range of postsecondary options, which I am pleased to see. Two children enter and are greeted with, “Welcome to Blue Sky U. What can I do for you today?” by one of the employees. A student requests some video training. “Ok, it will be just a minute while we wait for one of these ladies to finish up,” is the response. Within moments, a student finishes her computer activity and begins waiting on a student identification card that is being laminated by one of the other student workers. Once ready, she is presented with the card and leaves the shop. Only after she has gone does the worker realize that she never had the student pay for the services. The employee rushes out of the College and easily finds the girl in the square, bringing her back and completing the payment transaction. I step out of the College and make my way back to the Towne Square. There appears to be a lot of activity and many students are currently here.

A view from the greene. I situate myself once again on one of the park benches.

The morning session is now in full swing. I can readily see into several of the shops and watch Barbara supervise the two Disk Jockeys and another radio station worker as they generate a plan for playing requested



songs, their own favorite songs, and reading shop advertisements and slogans. A song is coming to a close and the female DJ swivels the microphone. “This is *Music Mania*, where music ROCKS! She then moves into the reading of an advertisement for the Container Shop. I see she is holding it in her hand and proceeds to read from the sheet the

shop has submitted. “Contain Yourself! Visit R.B. Containers and get your hand made briefcase while supplies last.” She then begins to play a tune by One Direction, which elicits an equal amount of excitement as dismay from students in the square.

Several students occupy park benches drinking sodas and juice boxes or eating cookies, and a few can be seen showing their purchases to friends. A boy lies on the carpet balancing his checkbook meticulously while a few teachers stand in one corner chatting with each other. I watch as a student



exits the
Parcel
Service
wearing his



trademark chocolate brown shirt. He is pushing a large cart. The top level of this cart has been sectioned off into smaller spaces created to house mail. Each section is maybe six inches by ten inches and is labeled with both a shop’s name and a simple picture. I believe the

addition of these graphics makes it an ideal job for students of varying abilities. Clearly this cart is intended to help students from the parcel service sort mail for ease in delivery. I watch the boy cut diagonally across the Greene to the UPS mailbox on the opposite corner. He stations his cart and kneels down to begin opening the mailbox, which has been secured with a combination lock. I watch him struggle to open this on several different attempts. Eventually, he leaves his post and returns to the shop where he appears

to have enlisted help from a fellow worker. Both boys resume kneeling positions and continue to fiddle with the lock mechanism on the mailbox. After several more failed attempts, they ask another boy, a Utility Shop worker on his way back to his own shop, and I presume friend of theirs, if he can help them. The boys discuss two different options for how they might make this work, suggesting first they trade off taking turns trying the combination but ultimately decide it will be best if they work together with each boy in charge of one aspect of the process. One boy punches in the combination while a second boy turns the cranking knob and the third boy begins to pry the door open using a tool from the caddy he was carrying when he was stopped. This process works and the door pops open. They take turns high-fiving each other in celebration. The utility worker goes on his way and the boys begin emptying the mail out of the box with one student showing the other one how to correctly read the checks to determine who it is from versus where it needs to go. They begin using the cart to sort the mail items by location. Diane approaches them. "I heard you guys were having some trouble with it?" referring to the mail drop box. They explain the situation with the stuck door. She punches in a few numbers and the door swings open easily with an easy turn of the knob. "Maybe the door was closed incorrectly," she suggests, "Let me know if you have trouble again." The boys look perplexed but continue on with their task. Once all the mail has been sorted one of the boys returns to the shop while the other is left to deliver the mail.

"Beep, beep, beep!" He squawks as he begins backing up with the cart. I watch as he goes from shop to shop dropping any mail items in the clear plastic mailbox slots hanging on the walls just inside the door of each location.

Just behind me I hear a student ask another girl, “How would you like to protect your eyes from the sun?” Clever way to advertise the sunglasses she is selling, I think to myself. Her efforts are successful and the girl makes a purchase. I watch as the College yearbook photographer who snaps a picture stops a small group of boys. It is likely to turn out nicely as the boys are sporting their uniforms for their jobs at the Market, Parts and Service, Warehouse and Mayoral duties. They pose for one more, this time making funny faces and gripping each other grapevine style around the shoulders. The photographer collects money from the boys and issues a receipt for the photos instructing them to, “Pick them up at the College after lunch.” She continues on her way, snapping candid photos of various activities around her occasionally stopping at the door of a shop to take a picture of what is happening inside.

A few students can be seen at the Donation Station in the northeast corner of the square. I move closer and hear one boy reading aloud the mission of the Make-A-Wish Foundation to three others. One of the boy places a few AmeriTowne dollars into the long, clear slot designated to this charity. While I watch, a girl approaches and writes a check for \$5.00, putting it in the slot for the Denver Zoo. Not far away, the television



commercial.

crew has left the Warehouse and stops in the center of Towne. I watch as a crewmember films what appears to be a 360 degree panoramic of the scene before the bunch of them move en masse to the Newspaper presumably to film another

I make my way toward the *Know it News* as they are calling themselves today. The space fills the corner of the Towne and has an interesting shape within. The area has been converted efficiently, and a high counter top fills much of the space. Two large signs hang from chains above the counter signifying which areas are the “NEWS DESK” and which spot is intended as “CIRCULATION” and there are stools for the employees, a copy machine, and a computer. Part of the counter has been replaced with an inset light table and a boy is busy here cutting and pasting advertisements. The news crew is exiting again, but apparently has given the paper a warning that they will be returning in a few minutes to shoot the commercial. “What should we do?” asks a female newspaper employee to the television crew.

“Practice?” he replies, then leaves.

There are only the two employees currently in the shop. The girl looks to the boy saying, “I’m so scared.” I guess this is because of the upcoming filming. Just then the ambulance (from the medical center) arrives at the shop.

“Wait,” says the newsgirl, “Can you come back?” She has directed this question, which is really more of a suggestion to the ambulance driver. “We’re about to do our commercial.” The ambulance boy shrugs as if to say sure and leaves once again. Two more newspaper employees have now returned to the shop and the previously nervous girl hugs one of the other girls, clearly relieved that they will be there for the filming. The four begin to brainstorm some ideas for the commercial. I wonder why they are just doing this now, or perhaps they are simply reviewing. They decide who will say which lines

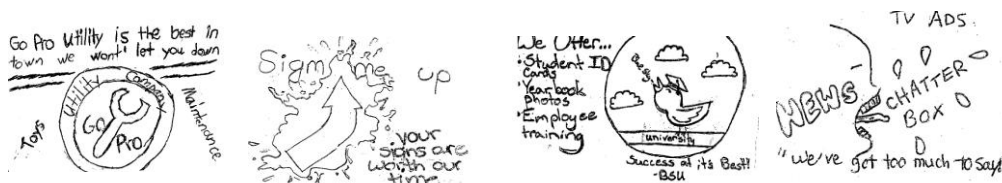
and soon the television crew returns to do their job. The videographer gives the group some instructions about what will transpire then begins taping. A few seconds in he stops,

TODAY'S WELLNESS TIP: Instead of watching T.V. or playing video games, go out and have some fun! Why play video games to feel adventurous when you can have adventures right in your own back yard?	What's Inside: Opinion/ Editorial.....Page 2A Weather.....Page 2A Features.....Page 2A Advertisements..... Pages 3A-5A
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it saying, “Wait...what’s your name again?” to a tall girl who had introduced herself on camera as the Editor of the paper. Once they are on familiar terms, he asks them to, “speak louder” “stay in frame” and inquires if they, “mind starting over” to which they all agree will be fine. My impression is that it does not go all that smoothly with several lags in the delivery of the script decided on only minutes beforehand. Once filming is complete, the videographer chimes in with his opinion that they really, “should film another one.” At this point, a small argument erupts with yelling between two of the newspaper staff, a couple of boys, and appears to center around the fact that one is missing his break for this commercial taping. Just then, Jimmy enters and inquires as to the issue. All four students begin speaking at once. Jimmy, very diplomatically, gives each person a few seconds to tell any pertinent information. During this exchange, I surmise that the two boys are brothers, or perhaps even twins, which perhaps might explain some of the problem. I wonder why with all the choices of locations and jobs that the two have been placed to work together but also know that teachers make these types of decisions at school. I make a note to ask the staff how often conflicts between students arise. The whole ordeal is easily solved through the presence of Jimmy, who ultimately suggests they change the missed break to one of the later times, which is still available

before leaving. At some point during the preceding minutes, the television crew has also left and one brother then turns to the other saying, “Great, they left!” adding in, “You’re welcome by the way,” in a snarky tone, as he has finished writing the other boy’s name on the break schedule. I guess the subpar commercial will have to stand.

I spend a few more minutes watching as the students take hand drawn ad forms from the shop’s mailbox, cut these out and position them on the template for their newspaper. I see that the bank has submitted an advertisement of a boy in a baseball hat holding bags of money in his outstretched arms. Some student has drawn large dollar signs on the bags and the slogan “We Like Big Bucks and We Cannot Lie!” has been



added. Interspersed with the shop ads are the logos of the corporate sponsors as well as some student artwork or an occasional joke such as: What has two hands but can’t clap? In the corner the answer has been written upside down: a clock.

I notice the Accountant is now reading from the local newspaper at his desk. A parent volunteer enters and approaches him, assuming correctly that the boy indeed has tasks he should be doing, and redirecting him to his checklist of duties for the morning. Interesting things are happening within the newspaper, but I cannot help but wonder if adult intervention might be required much of the day. Mark, Barbara, Diane and Jimmy had all made reference to the ideas of teamwork, or students learning to deal with varied personalities as being essential to groups successfully running the shops. The newspaper

group appears to be a good example of students who might require more support with this today.

The previous sections demonstrate some of the ways that the AmeriTowne program provides students for a great deal of opportunity for interpersonal interactions. Students must rely on one another and work together, negotiating social interactions throughout their day. Additionally, students must apply academic knowledge, use creativity, and take risks as can be seen in the descriptions provided.

I once again make my way to the Towne Greene, noticing there are a lot of students in that area.

Your honor we've got a runner. The Police Officers have become quite busy. Four of them are now in the Towne Square area monitoring for any offenses they can find. I watch as a student is ticketed by one of the officers because he did not salute the park bench. Another officer has come today ready for his role in Towne. He is grasping a wallet that he has made into a badge holder. On the front of the wallet he has affixed a police logo adding the words "Justice To All in the Hall" in a circle surrounding it. Inside he has printed off a photo of a badge, which he has cut out and taped to the center flap. He appears to be enjoying flashing this badge to citizens sporadically as he tickets them.

"Do a dance move!" yells another officer as a reminder to a student nearing the Radio Station.

A few more kids appear to be conscientious about recording debits and checks, moving straight to available park benches after making purchases. One little boy can be

heard talking to himself, “Ok, do I have everything?” He checks his pockets while saying, “Debit card, checkbook...ok,” as he gets up and continues on his way.

The Community Relations Director seems to have been perfectly selected for his role today. A very personable young man, he stops a couple of girls, “So, Katie...who do you think has the best customer service today?” he has begun casually leaning on her, his bent arm on her shoulder.

“Snack Shop!” she exclaims.

“Whattid ya buy there?” he wants to know.

“A cookie and Sprite” she replies.

“Why was it so good?” he prods.

“They were soooooo busy but they were fast,” she informs.

“Great. Thanks. Go enjoy your break.” The Community Relations director gives the girls a fist bump before they walk away. Within a minute or so, an employee of the Snack Shop passes by. “Best customer service? We’ll see...” he jokes pointing toward the boy, giving him the double finger I’ve-got-my-eyes-on-you signal.

“Be our guest- invest with the best!,” announces DJ Money Maker, “That’s the message from Money Mutual. Be sure to see them for all your investment needs and to buy great products. And now here’s Psy with Gangnam Style.” As the music fires up, a few students in every pocket of the Towne can be seen mimicking the trademark giddyup dance of the singer. Even one of the police officers takes part in the fun.

She soon spies a Parcel Carrier running from his shop to the mailbox. She approaches him and begins writing out a ticket. The mail carrier calls another student

over from his post nearby where he was selling items outside his own shop. “Francisco, did you see this *run-ning*?” he asks the salesman.

“I believe he was speed walking...cuz he’s the mailman,” replies the witness.

“I understand it’s your right. You can plead innocent in court,” adds the female officer. I take this to mean she knows he has the right to tell his side to the judge. She continues filling out the ticket form. “Hmmm,” she says looking at the large clock in the Towne Square’s corner. “I’m just going to put 11:30.” It is actually 11:27, and the officer finishes filling out the form and walks the postman and his witness to toward the Towne Hall to see the Judge. I follow about fifteen feet behind. Entering through the pillars, the three make their way up the step and toward the judge’s table. There he sits swiveling his slatted back, wooden chair. The knot of his tie is clearly visible above the neckline of his black robe. He is busy organizing tickets chronologically by the times they were submitted to the court. Taking the step up to the judge’s bench she excitedly announces, “Your Honor, we’ve got a runner!”

“Do you have your ticket?” asks the Judge, taking it and recording it into the Towne Hall’s “Record of Violations” log. “What law did he break?” he inquires. The officer, the mailman and the witness each take their turn recounting their version of the infraction. The postman details that he was working and thought the laws were for when students were on breaks. I notice that the police officer has written “To Protect And Serve” on her name-tag. “Well, I’m not exactly sure what to do with these circumstances,” the judge says, clearly pondering his options. “You are not lying? You

were working?” continues the judge, “For not knowing to follow rules when also working, I find you innocent.”

The boy cheers and the two citizens leave the court. All the while the Mayor has



sat next to the judge, occupied with his own work signing business licenses, referring to the application paperwork for the business names each shop has submitted. A Parcel Service worker enters and leans on the railing. “Hello

Mr. Mayor. You need to sign all these. There’s like 30 of them.” He hands over a stack of papers, “Certificates of Achievement” they read. The mayor appears a bit perplexed.

“They’re just for all the managers -- Do you want me to show you what to do?”

“No, I’m okay,” assures the mayor, but I am not convinced that he is happy about having to add the seventeen manager certificates to his already incomplete workload. He places them under the business licenses and proceeds working.

A second police officer enters, with a girl in tow. The two approach the large sturdy table. “Do you know why you’ve been ticketed today?” asks the judge.

“Yep,” is the girl’s response.

“Not dancing,” the officer elaborates.

“But Judge, you can see I’ve got a cast on,” the girl protests. It appears the student has been seen in the Medical Center and during that time was fitted with boot. It is a bit oversized and the Velcro straps have been pulled pretty tightly.

“Yes, I see it,” Judge Smith remarks. “But it’s a walking cast?” he questions.

“Yah,” she says.

“So, *slow* dancing is *dancing*,” he suggests raising his eyebrows.

“No fair!” chime in two students who have entered with two other police officers.

“Order in the court!” yells the judge smacking his wooden gavel on a wooden plate intended for this purpose. “Guilty! Two dollars!” he hits the gavel once more. The girl moves off to the side and begins filling out a check for her fine before leaving. The judge calls the next culprit to the bench. “What happened?” asks the judge to the police officer.

“He didn’t do the bathroom law,” is the officer’s reply.

The student does not appear happy, adding, “But they pulled me over before I could do it!”

The judge asks the officer to circle the violation on the ticket and proceeds to then record it in his logbook. “But this is the second time you’ve been in here [for something]. You need to pay more attention. This is your chance -- don’t let me catch you in here again or you WILL be paying \$2.00. I’m giving you one minute of community service. You can pick up any trash you see out there in the park.” He points toward the Greene and the boy and the police officer begin to leave. To the police officer he adds, “If there’s not trash keep him in custody for one minute.” To the remaining student he asks, “Why are you here?”

“A misunderstanding,” the boy says and begins to fake cry.

“Whadda ya mean...*misunderstanding*,” inquires the Judge.

“I didn’t know you couldn’t eat outside of the snack shop. I only thought you couldn’t eat in the shops if you were working then,” the boy explains. The fake crying has now ceased.

“We announced it this morning out loud,” is the Judge’s response. “I find you guilty!” rapping the gavel a few times. “The fine is two dollars...Checks only,” he adds because the boy is beginning to take cash out of his clear, plastic baggie.

“I don’t know how to do the checks,” replies the boy.

“Sir, as a citizen with a checkbook you really ought to know how to actually fill out a check,” responds the judge. “Here,” he points to the memo line, “Write ticket,” and he shows the boy how to fill out the rest of the check. The boy begins to sip his soda that he had brought in with him. “Is your middle name illegal?” says the Judge half-jokingly, “Because you’re still breaking the rule drinking in the Hall and I *could* give you a *double* fine.”

“Oops. Sorry.”

“Go. Don’t come back, please,” remarks the Judge taking the check.

The student leaves passing the Newspaper Reporter as he enters. He flashes the “Press Pass” badge, which hangs from his neck, at the Police Officer stepping by him, “Mr. Mayor, I need to interview you.” The mayor puts down his pen. “So why did you want to become the mayor?” the reporter starts in. This information will become part of the front page news. The reporter scribbles a few notes on his notepad as the Mayor speaks. The whole interview lasts only a couple of minutes.

“Judge,” enters the female police officer, “I forgot to get your signature on the ticket.” She moves up next to the reporter and hands the judge a paper and he initials a space on it.

“We’re making a lot of money!” the Judge calls over to the accountant who sits at her roll top desk near the doorway. Getting up from his seat the judge comes over and drops quite a few checks on her desk. “When’s your break?” he inquires.

“Remember, I already took it, so not till the afternoon,” she reminds.

The space has vacated at least for the moment, and I make my way back out onto the brick sidewalk. Near me, a student approaches a teacher. “Do you know where Fernando is right now? I’m so furious!” she proclaims. The teacher asks what the problem is and the student explains that Fernando has gone over his break time. “If you see him, will you talk to him about it?” asks the student.

“Actually, since you are his manager, I think you should talk to him. But I’ll bring him to you when I see him,” informs the teacher.



“Hey everyone! When *you* don’t have a *clue*, go to Know-It-News! Papers are on sale this afternoon!” advertise the Radio Disk Jockeys in the background. In front of the Snack Shop, a boy hobbles around using one crutch before entering. I make my way in that direction.

Can we fix you? Yes we can! As I enter the shop, I see it is very busy. Each of the seven stools at the counter are currently occupied by students enjoying snacks. Behind them, students also stand. Some have been helped and also eat their food while a couple of

them have chips they purchased across the way at the Market and have come to eat here with their friends. “Hey, you want anything?” a boy behind the counter directs his question to another student, the boy with the crutch, who has inched his way toward the counter.

“Can I have a soda?”

“You most certainly may. What kind?” he lists off the choices adding, “Or we can mix two together if you like that.” The customer orders a Coca-Cola and the boy behind the counter relays his request to the girl at the drink machine. “So where do you work?” he asks.

“Bank,” says the customer. It is unclear to me whether these boys are friends or simply exchanging pleasantries.

“How’s your business going?” asks the Snack employee. The customer shrugs. “Lots of profit here!” the boy adds, handing over the drink, “Two dollars, please.” The customer pays and leaves the shop. “Hey you want anything?” he is already calling out to two girls who have just entered.

A board in the corner of the shop reveals a hand written notice: cookies \$2.00; morning popizcles (popscicles) \$3.00; afternoon drinks \$2.00; and a note at the bottom buy both for \$4.00. Evidentially the shop has chosen to run some sort of sales promotion for customers purchasing both a snack and a drink. Two students from the Medical Center have arrived with the ambulance. “We’re here for one of your Sales People. Which one of you has blistering of the skin?”

The two students behind the counter look from one to the other and finally the boy says, “Noooo! We’re so busy!” then adds dejectedly, “I’ll go.” He rounds the counter and seats himself in the wheelchair. “So what happened?”

“You burned yourself and you have blistering of the skin,” the Medical Technician responds. Other students in the shop have stepped aside and the Ambulance Drivers wheel the injured boy in the direction of the Medical Center. I follow.

Once inside the Center the boy is wheeled to one side of the room. He is given a chair to sit on and the Ambulance Drivers remove a laminated index card from a file box nearby leaving once again with the wheelchair. At the back of the room, a girl sits on an exam table swinging her legs. “Can you hand me a magazine while I wait?” the patient asks, directing the question to one of the medical assistants who in turn hands her one from the periodical rack hanging on the wall.

The injured Snack Shop worker has received help from one of the girls clad in light blue surgical scrubs and hair net. She has assisted him in filling out his intake form, writing in his name, birthday, and place of employment before handing the clipboard over to him for his signature. “You need to give us your co-pay,” she states.

“How much is it?” he asks.

The employee points to the wipe board near the door where “What’s Up Doc?” has been written by a student in large block lettering, indicating the name they have given themselves today. Underneath of that “Can We Fix You? Yes We Can!” has also been scribbled. Clearly posted is “Co-Pays \$2.00” and with star near it, “Remember Your Checkbook.” This seems meant as a reminder from the Center that citizens can only use a

check as a form of payment today. In smaller writing underneath is “sticky eyeballs \$1.00” and a clear bin of them has been placed on display nearby.

The boy submits his co-pay to the Medical Assistant who then instructs him to, “Please step over here.” She places a thermometer tape across his forehead and records the information on his intake form. “Right here now,” she says, slightly pulling on his



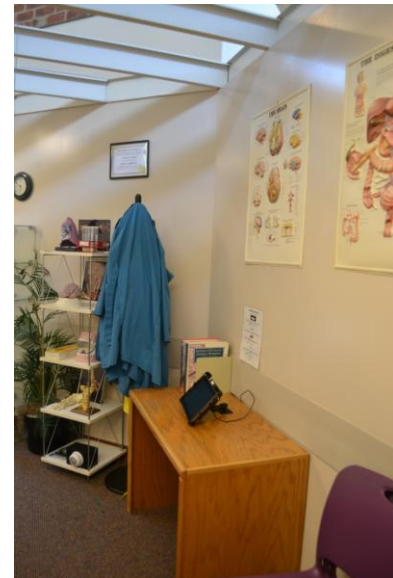
arm. The boy steps over a few paces and is instructed to step up on the scale by the assistant. She takes her time sliding the metal mass across the bar to determine the boy’s weight, which she also adds to the

health form. “Ok, follow me,” she instructs and proceeds to stand him next to a height chart affixed to the wall which she uses to check how tall he is again writing down this information. “Please come over here,” she then requests. “Can I have your good hand?”

The boy holds out a hand and she clamps the white, plastic probe of the pulse oximeter over the end of his finger.

Instantly the small box attached to it begins to register numbers. “97? Does that thing really work?” asks the boy.

“Yep,” she responds, adding this final number to his health form. Indeed it looks to be a fully functioning machine. “You’re fine. Please come over



here to this chair while you wait for the doctor.” She walks him to the opposite side of the room and seats him in a chair next to a computer.

The doctor, a boy wearing a stethoscope, is sitting at the computer and has used a drop down menu to find “blistering burn.” He then uses the information displayed to tell the boy how to care for his wound. He chooses an ace bandage from the multitude of medical supplies available and wraps it around the boy’s hand. It has been wrapped in a loose and unorganized fashion, and the patient asks, “How long do I have to wear this?” The doctor informs him that really he should wear it until it heals but lets him know in this case that he may return to the Medical Center in about fifteen minutes to have it removed. This comment leads me to believe that the doctor sees the distinction between the real portion of the simulation (an actual injury that might occur), and the portion of the simulation that is fictional (the boy isn’t really hurt and doesn’t want to wear the bandage for the rest of the day). As the boy is leaving, he joins the girl from the exam table, who is also leaving. “What’s wrong?” he inquires.

“Oh, I had nausea, dizziness, all sorts of stuff, but I’m okay to leave now,” she replies, “You?”

“Blistering of the skin,” he says holding up the bandaged hand for his friend to see.

At once the ambulance has entered with another patient from the College. Reportedly the student is experiencing headaches, muscle aches, fever, and a loss of appetite. A Medical Assistant begins having her fill out her form and again proceeds with taking vital statistics on the new patient. “Can I have a barf bin?” the girl weakly says and

the employee hands over a metal bowl shaped item from a nearby surgical stand. The girl proceeds to cough, sputter and feign vomiting in the newly acquired receptacle.

“Can I get some help here?” calls out the Medical Assistant urgently, “Our patient is throwing up!” Another girl comes over and the two begin aiding the girl who by this point is captivating everyone with her theatrics.

With the situation soon under control the Doctor resumes diagnosing a male patient, a Market Employee who has been brought in with an enlarged spleen, headache, sore throat, and fever. “What’s wrong with me?” asks the boy.

The Doctor accurately diagnoses the boy as having Mononucleosis and shares the associated signs, symptoms, and prevention that he has obtained from the computer. He then begins to improvise taking out an X-Ray of some lungs and placing it over the lighted viewing box. It has been hung backwards and the lettering is not correct.

“Edward, I’m sorry, but it looks like you have a tumor in your lungs,” he points to a spot on the x-ray he has posted. By this time a Medical Assistant has noticed the X-Ray is backward and has changed it for accurate viewing. “Now it’s beginning to affect your spleen,” continues the doctor hanging another X-Ray of some hips. He begins pointing to the pelvis and shows Edward various “problems”. The information is completely inaccurate, but the portrayal the boy gives as a Doctor is thoroughly convincing. Edward is finally released with instructions to, “See another doctor,” as soon as he can.

“What’s Up Doc?” continues to be a very busy place. The Ambulance has brought in a Pilot. “I’m soooo sick,” he complains. A Health Technician fills out the form recording fever and tender swollen legs under symptoms adding in the Pilot’s vital

specifics. Once again the Doctor uses the computer and gives the Pilot a diagnosis of “scurvy”. I am fairly sure this is not the correct ailment, but the doctor does know and explains to the boy that it means he has a deficiency of vitamin C. At that moment, the Newspaper Reporter and Photographer arrive on site, taking notes and snapping a picture of the two boys proclaiming that this is going to be their “Top Story”.

Over the loudspeaker, the Radio DJs can be heard reading an advertisement that has been submitted by Travel company before announcing, “This song is called ‘Stand By Me’ with a shout out to Shelley for being such a good friend.”

A few doors down a girl pops into the Container Shop, “Do you still have briefcases?” she asks.

“You’re in luck! We have one more left!” responds Simeon, an employee. I see that on his nametag under his name he has added “Serving You Since 2013.” I watch as the two complete their transaction. “Thank You,” says Simeon. The girl leaves the shop with her purchase. “We sold the last briefcase!” Simeon yells proudly to the Assemblers at the back of the shop, and then as if an afterthought, darts outside hollering, “Have a nice day!” to the girl who is now almost half way across the Towne Square.

On one of the park benches near the Utility Shop, a police officer sits eating a cookie. Another student can be seen running in excitement but when she passes in front of the officer she purposely begins following the rule, slowing herself to a walk. The police officer points to his hat, which he has turned backward and to the drink he has set next to him, as if to say *Don’t worry, I’m on break*. Only yards away, inside the *Speedy Delivery Parcel Service*, a student buys a stamp to mail a postcard he has filled out. I

notice that while Colleen introduced the shop's product as a pokey pet (a soft, rubber ball with spikes and a face) that the Parcel team is advertising it as a Pocket Pet writing "It will keep you company" along with its new name on their wipe board. Additionally, they have creatively re-named the stress ball product they are selling a "Sphere of Serenity" and have drawn a smiley face and written the word ENJOY! "You look like a lonely guy," a salesman says to a passerby. "You need a Pocket Pet!"

Next door at the Utility Company a student has come back to return a faulty flashlight that does not work. "It's unrefundable," he is told by a Sales Associate, but when the manager hears this he takes it upon himself to come over and informs the employee to exchange it for a new one. Skeptically the employee receives the non-working item, passing a new one to the customer who tests it out before walking away smiling. This manager also appears to be taking his role quite seriously. He has written Mr. Johnson on his nametag along with the title Manager. He suggests that the salesman take the broken item to the Warehouse to let them know that the product they were given does not work, and to see about exchanging it for one that does.

The employee leaves his shop and makes his way next door to the Warehouse. Inside the Warehouse the industrial, metal shelving units that line two of the walls are stacked neatly with clearly labeled, plastic totes. An Accountant sits in the front corner busily working in his large, business check register while another boy focuses on carving names into metal dog tags with an electric tool. A third worker is entrenched in her task of restocking a few plastic bins for tomorrow's group and has many items spread out on

the floor of the shop in front of her. The Go Pro employee steps over the toys on the floor, “Excuse me,” he says.

“Uh...this area is kind of...uh...restricted,” replies the girl. The boy respectfully takes a step away before inquiring about his exchange. “That *seems* fair,” the girl responds and pulls down the bin with the flashlights handing him another. She takes the faulty item and places it on one corner of the counter near the shop’s computer. Taking a small sheet of paper, she writes *brocken* [broken] and lays the item on top presumably for the AmeriTowne staff.

In walks another girl who receives help to fill out an order form for two sets of dog tag necklaces. In the personalization section she has written that she would like them to read BFF signifying best friends forever. “Do you accept credit cards?” she asks.

“You mean *debit cards*, yes.” she is reminded. The male employee completes the sale before returning to his job carving the metal items. It appears he has been busy and much of the front counter is lined with order forms from students, many of which now have completed dog tags stacked on top ready for pick up. “We should raise our prices,” he suggests. After the three Warehouse employees discuss this idea for a moment, the accountant changes the wipe board to read: Dog Tags \$5 — only 3 left before we sell out!!!! Perhaps they will start a countdown on their sales.

The previous vignettes provide insight into some of the ways that students use intrapersonal skills in addition to the interpersonal, and they also show some ways that students apply academic skills during their day in Towne. Additionally, here students can be seen using background knowledge to inform their own actions and using this to

complete their assigned jobs, enhancing their roles during the simulation in creative ways. The physical environment plays a heavy role in the students' learning and provides a meaningful context to support the other elements such as the academic and the social aspects.

“Attention AmeriTowne citizens,” the loudspeaker squawks, “It is now lunchtime.

Please stop what you are doing and bring your lunch to the Towne Square. Please stop what you are doing and come to the Towne Square for lunch.” Students begin to make their way to the carpeted area toting lunch boxes, brown bags and some carry drinks they have purchased earlier in the day.



Who ya gonna call? Within moments, students fill the carpeted area. They can be seen sitting in groups and pairs, and Colleen once again resumes her place at near the front of the room. She claps a pattern to get the attention of the students, who return the clapping pattern to her. She waits a few seconds before doing another pattern, standing patiently for a few moments after the students have reciprocated it. She congratulates the group on the job they are doing so far smiling all the while. Additionally, she makes a few general announcements, reminding students that the T.V. station has “Worked really hard this morning, filming all your commercials,” and adding in a reminder of, “So let’s give our best attention.”

With that, she motions toward the large television screen that is mounted high above the T.V. station affixed to the wall. Underneath it, in all capital letters, the words

ON AIR begin to glow red. An image of the Towne Hall appears on the screen. In steps Tiffany the Newscaster, “Everyone is here in Towne Hall is getting ready for the ceremony, and here we have the guys behind the lens who are going to make it all happen.” With that two boys appear in frame waving then disappear again behind the camera. “Are you ready?” she asks, and the familiar scene from this morning’s opening plays out again on the television screen ending with the Mayor’s speech, the ribbon cutting and him telling the citizens to “Let’s go get to work!”

The scene cuts out and appears again, this time up pops the news team and a few other students wearing aprons and hats. The children introduce themselves by name and give their job titles at “Spark It Market” where they sell “dynamalicious” food. One of the workers is holding an artistic rendering of stick of dynamite that has been created using marker and construction paper. Grant, the manager, is wearing his own short-sleeved dress shirt and tie and has added some pens into his front breast pocket. He must have a preconceived mental image of what a manager looks like because he arrived today in Towne with a mustache drawn on his face with permanent black marker. The newsgirl asks how he feels about running a business and he replies that it “has been new and that it is a LOT of work.” I think back to Mr. Williams’ comments about the importance of exposing these young students to the work world they will someday enter.

The on screen scene changes once again and up pops a second newsgirl. “We’re here now at my friend Emily’s bank. Let’s find out a few reasons why this bank,” motioning toward the doorway, “*The Rusty Penny* is so reliable.” On the screen come the Tellers, the Bank President and the Data Entry Worker. The President lets everyone know

that they will be granting business loans adding, “We’re your only local bank.” Before passing it off to the girls with the comment, “We’ve got a commercial we made for you today. It’s a parody of ‘Thriftshop.’” He is referring to the popular 2012 song by Macklemore and Lewis.

“Bada-ba-ba, bada-ba-ba,” sing the girls, “We’re gonna cash your check...you’ll get twenty dollars for your pock-et, for you to get toys, for you to buy food...we are really awe-some!”

Once the girls on the screen finish, the newscaster ends the segment stating, “Well there you have it! Come to the bank!”

The footage continues to run for several more minutes with a combination of interviews and commercials that run the gamut between scripted or formulaic and cleverly creative. While the students, teachers, and parent volunteers are busy eating their lunches, I notice a few of the staff members going from shop to shop checking accounting ledgers and generally looking into each location to be sure everything appears fine for the afternoon session. Here and there they make some changes or scribble some notes for the students leaving them instructions on how to proceed. From where I sit, I am able to see that some of the stores signs have been made and delivered by the Sign and Print shop during the morning session. Some of them have been accurately placed in the large plastic frame holders intended for this purpose, while others have been taped to the front windows of the shops or onto the white dry erase boards near the doors. I am not sure whether this is by mistake or on purpose and names such as: “Rocking Warehouse World”; the slogan, “where delivery ROCKS” has been given to the warehouse; “Up, Up

and Away: Go High or Go Home” has been assigned to the travel shop. The students have clearly given thought to these names, slogans and mottos, and overall they are clever and fun.

On screen, a group of boys in blue, button up style work shirts introduce their business as “Magic Mechanics.” They show the automotive themed products they are selling: street sign lollipops, disc shooters, and plastic cars ending their segment with the reminder to come to their shop adding, “If you bring in your car, we’ll get it fixed and get it right back to you. We’re Magic Mechanics...Poof... It’s Fixed!” And the boys’ images leave the screen. I see a boy on the carpeted area high five his friend who just starred in the commercial. They both look proud. Here and there teachers have begun to check in on individual students asking to view their checkbook registers. It appears that some students have accurately been recording purchases, while others seem to have skipped this step. Some get a brief review on just how to do this. Yet other students receive reminders to be sure to use their checks and debit cards when the teachers determine the students have not accessed these bank funds yet.

The television footage continues on screen where a group of girls squeal and giggle because they don’t appear to know what to say. One of them begins her attempt to creep out of the view of the camera resulting in her coworker pulling her back by the arm. The camera continued to roll during the ensuing conversation including comments that can be heard from the camera crew of, “Are you on number 3?” I take this to mean it is the third attempt at trying to get a good commercial or interview shot and this portion has not yet been edited out. I wonder if the news crew will attempt to fix this before saving it

to the disc that will ultimately go back to school with the students. Next, a container shop employee introduces himself as Monte, taking a blow up, plastic hammer the shop is selling and hitting his head rhythmically with it on his hard hat singing, “Con-tain-er Shop” to Toby Keith’s tune for Red Solo Cup.

Most students continue to eat and watch the news footage, while others have begun to whisper to one another and a few children can be seen rough housing. Some of the AmeriTowne staff members have finished their work within the shops and have pulled up chairs to eat their own lunches and watch the commercials with the students. They have traded spots with other staff members who can now be seen reviewing their assigned locations. Staff member Jimmy appears from the employee work-room carrying a medium sized box. He takes it to the freezer of “The Snack Attack” unloading popsicles onto three shelves found within.

Near me a girl returns from the restroom and enthusiastically informs her friend that in the bathroom by the sink there is a real sign that says, “Attention: All employees must wash hands before returning to work.” She informs her it is, “Just like the one at Qdoba.” It seems that she appreciates the realism of the work environment provided by the Towne. The friend then recounts an experience she had at a local mall where she saw a sign about shoplifters receiving free bracelets, adding, “You know, like, handcuffs,” encircling her wrists with her thumb and forefinger while saying this.

“If you have a problem...and you wanna get it fixed...who ya gonna call...call utilities!” chimes the group on camera, employees of “Go Pro Utilities” who report they will be providing utility maintenance for the Towne. The boys have clearly based their

commercial off of the movie song for *Ghostbusters*, and they give their business address on Profit Parkway before the segment ends. Suddenly the face of Shaun the Mayor fills the screen and he is interviewed by Tori the newscaster, Tiffany's cohort. She asks him briefly about his hopes for the day. He informs her that "[he] wants everyone to have a great and memorable time and to work together." A commercial for "The Circle Office" (Towne Hall) follows concluding with all of the hall's employees chanting in unison, "We are your elected officials and we approve this message," while each gives a salute to the camera. Surely someone has seen campaign advertisements and suggested borrowing this tactic for the group's commercial. I cannot help but note that many of the lunchtime activities spotlight some of the ways that students are able to apply creative elements during the simulation and the ways that students have used their own prior knowledge and experiences to create the commercials, slogans and advertisements.

The screen goes black and Colleen once again takes her spot near the front of the room. She requests a round of applause for the television crew and the students oblige. A few begin to wiggle and stand and Colleen once again asks them to remain seated for, "A couple of quick announcements." Once all the students have taken their seats Colleen continues. She reminds the students that they will each receive one more break this afternoon. She explains that the Warehouse will begin bringing around each shop's afternoon shipment of products and supplies and explains that the Snack Shop will be selling Icee treats this afternoon and that the



newspaper will be sold now that it has been printed. “Today is probably the only time you will ever be told to do this,” she continues, “But be sure to spend all your money. AmeriTowne dollars are not good outside of the Towne, and you can’t take them with you when you leave, so be sure to spend them today.” She asks if any of the students have any questions.

One girl raises her hand asking, “Can we deposit the money we don’t spend into our account?”

“In real life, yes, but here today, no, which reminds me,” she says.

In the real world you can go into your bank and ask them how much money you have and the bank will tell you. But here at AmeriTowne, if you go into the bank this afternoon and ask them what your balance is, they are not going to have that information to tell you. In fact, this afternoon the only people who should be going into the bank are Accountants making business deposits.

She continues with a few brief announcements regarding the television crew who will continue to film and may want to conduct interviews, finally ending with an announcement about using the large, rolling, garbage cans and recycling bins that have been brought out to collect lunch trash. She dismisses the students and as they make their way back to their shops I watch as a group of three children help three other students with obvious special needs to complete their clean up before walking them back to their respective shops.

We want a refund! The Radio Station starts up the music, Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*, and it comes across clearly over the speaker system. The carpeted square is

littered with trash in a few locations and I wonder if the judge will again assign “Park clean up” for community service this afternoon. The area could use it at this point.

Behind me I hear a girl in R.B. Containers saying, “Thank you sooooo much! We need this!” with gratitude to the Warehouse Employee in regard to the shipment of new cardboard for briefcases.

“Have fun making suitcases!” replies the delivery man as he leaves.

I enter into the shop in time to overhear the Accountant asking the Manager to come over. “Are we bankrupt or what?” The second boy, the Manager, looks down at where the Accountant is pointing to the print out he has created using the calculator, adding machine. “We’re negative!” the accountant admits painfully.

“Ooooooh. Well, it’s not the end of the day soooooo,” is the manager’s reply as he shows his hands palms up as if to say, who knows? “But wait! We sold all our briefcases!” It seems he has realized that they should not be struggling. “Maybe you should check it again?” he suggests. Back at the workbench one assembler has hit the wooden piece too hard and it has cracked. He brings it to the manager and holds it out but doesn’t say anything. “Go show the supervisor,” he says and points toward Jimmy who is out in the Towne Greene. The afternoon session is underway, but it seems that it has taken a few extra minutes for the Towne to resettle and for normal activity to resume.

I exit Containers and move across the square toward the Sign and Print shop. They have decided to call themselves “Sign Me Up” and have created a sign with large lettering with a huge arrow in the backdrop. Next to their shop sign, a hand written sign

reads “Mother’s Day Cards For Sail” (sale). Great entrepreneurial idea, I think to myself, as Mother’s Day is only four days away.

Barbara and Jimmy had recounted, similar to the above example, that quite often students use clever ways to generate profit. Jimmy said, “I don’t think sometimes schools are like places that allow you that creativity or context to be able to do that” meaning to think outside of the box.

Likewise about this Barbara had said, “There is a lot of chance for them to explore and create and do things their own way” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

Meanwhile, the television crew has entered, and I anticipate that a commercial will be filmed. However, I am incorrect. The manager from the TV station has accompanied the group because of a problem with the business sign the station had ordered. “This is our sign,” he shows the print shop employees, “But this is not what we ordered.” He is upset and he offers the sign example to the staff member.

“We want a refund! We want a refund!” chants the videographer from behind his manager. I am surprised they haven’t decided to film this since they have brought the camera with them.

“Can you go get your manager?” asks the station manager to the employee.

The print shop manager approaches and fields the station manager’s complaint. “I know, we went to put a picture of people on it, but the computer wasn’t working and wouldn’t let us, so we did you a substitute and put a T.V. on it. Do you want us to find a

different one?" she asks. I am not sure if she is talking about finding a different picture of a television or a different picture all together.

"No, thanks. That makes sense," replies the newsman.

"We want a refund!" resumes the cameraman.

"Guys, it's okay," is the manager's reply as he makes a settle down motion with both hands.

Meanwhile in the shop a sale has been made for disappearing ink and the customer receives help to write out the check. One employee asks another if the check should be made payable to "Sign and Print or Sign Me Up" and the accountant calls out, "Doesn't matter! I take both!" from his desk near the front.

A utility worker uses his Technical Manual notebook to fix a circuit breaker inside. When he finishes he approaches a worker asking, "Sir, would you like to sign this..." He has trailed off because he doesn't seem to know the word for invoice.



He proffers the metal clipboard to the employee who proceeds to call over his manager offering the response of, "I'm going to need to get my manager for that." Once the manager has been summoned, she signs the form and passes it off to the accountant for payment.

Directly across the Towne Greene two boys in pilot uniforms and hats stand in the doorway of the Travel Company. They have decided to create a choreographed dance

in response to the Radio Station's play selection *Mirrors* by Justin Timberlake. They have created a sort of swish or wave movement in time with the song using double thumbs up and completing the move by pointing back toward their shop as if to motion "come on in". They are using this to get customers as a way to invite them to try out the flight simulator video game they have for sale.

A few doors down, the Investment Center team has clipped their merchandise to posters near the front door. Just inside a boy can be seen using a tablet style computer at a desk where multiple copies of *The Wall Street Journal* are stacked. I pass and stand near the Television Station for a few minutes before going in.

Sunny storms. The girls in the newsroom decide to film an extra newscast because the group comprised of the two girls and two boys has finished taping all the commercials for the Towne. They spend a few



minutes collaborating and giving ideas for what they want to do. Ideas such as a sportscast, a weather report, and a "special assignment" are discussed and the students begin to peruse the daily copy of *The Denver Post* on the news desk for ideas. As the students brainstorm, a service technician arrives to complete some work. He holds a tool caddy in his hands and is unable to figure out what he should be doing. The news crew pays him no mind so he leaves and returns shortly with Robert, the AmeriTowne staff member. Robert shows him where to find the thermostat and how to use the red markings to record information on his work order form. The student thanks Robert and then asks

one of the station employees to make it, “Official” by having her sign the bill before dropping it off on the accountant’s desk. The accountant is currently out in the Towne on break so will have to handle it upon return.

The group has come to a consensus on what they will film and the cameraman announces, “On air in 3...2...1 and action!”

Tiffany begins reading some headlines from the newspaper then says, “Wait! Stop it,” referring to the rolling camera and the boy shuts it off. “Won’t that be kinda weird... just headlines and a commercial?” She seems to be realizing that their idea is not a realistic depiction of a newscast. “What’s our jingle for the radio again?” The students gather and begin singing the jingle they had made up. “Ok, what if I sign on and you zoom in on me and then we do the jingle and maybe we should have a weather girl. I could be like, now off to the weather girl.” The group agrees that her idea is a good one and they ready themselves for taping once again. “I’ve always totally wanted to do this!” adds Tiffany excitedly.

The boy with the camera takes the tripod and steps backward about a yard. “We’re live!” and he begins a rolling motion with his hands as if to say “come on, get going.”

“Don’t snooze, watch that news...we’re the Chatter Box news, yaaaah!” sings Tiffany ending with her right arm up as she wiggles her fingers on yah. “Now off to the weather girl!” With that prompt, Tori comes rushing over to join Tiffany.

“Cut!” yells the cameraman, “This is going to be lame if we keep messing up.”

“Ok, then lemme practice,” says Tori. The two girls begin to talk deciding that they will change things a bit and create a plan to possibly do the jingle together, do a story on the snack shop, and then finish with the weather. They devise a script of sorts and spend a few minutes in practice.

Meanwhile, the accountant has returned and approaches the boy managing the station. “Does the Parts and Service shop still need to do a commercial? They never paid us,” she reports.

“They never turned in a form,” is the manager’s reply. “Maybe we should ask Robert.” The manager stands at the doorway of the station waving for Robert to come over. Once Robert arrives, he explains the situation with the missing order resulting in not filming a commercial for that shop.

“Alright,” says Robert, “What do you want to do? Do you have time to film one?”

“I think so,” the manager responds.

“Wait!” chimes in the accountant, “Could we just film it and then bill them?”

“Sure,” says Robert, “Are you just going to make them a bill on paper?” The accountant nods affirmatively.

“I’ll go make a bill,” says the accountant to the manager, returning to her desk.

By this point the girls are ready to film and the manager and cameraman resume their positions. The camera begins rolling, focusing in on Tiffany who stands solo in front of the news desk and sings her jingle once again adding in, “I’m Tiffany Walters with an

update on the Snack Shop. ‘Snack Attack’ is now selling frozen treats, so get them while *you’re* hot, now on to our weather girl, Sunny Storms!”

The camera shifts to Tori, now calling herself Sunny Storms, who stands in front of a large map of the United States. “Hi guys! I’m Sunny! It’s going to be nice here in Colorado and down here in Tennessee it is going to be rainy,” she begins moving the magnetic weather symbols around the map.

The videographer stops her, “Wait, wait! What if you just do Colorado? Then we could zoom in and you could use your idea about using the days magnets.” He’s pointing to the map as he suggests this.

They resume once more, “Hi! I’m Sunny and I’ve got your extended forecast just for Colorado!” She seems excited. She uses the magnets, placing them across the bottom of the board adding in weather symbols as she speaks. “Get ready for 12 inches of snow in April” she continues placing a snowflake symbol near the word Sun. “Now back to T and T out in the tow... field,” she giggles.

“Oops!” says the boy with the video, “Don’t worry about it. We can change it. Actually, what if you say now back to T and T in the field and you could mention other new toys or we could talk about...” He grabs the newspaper, and they begin looking for a story to add.

“Guys, we have to go do the commercial at the Parts and Service first,” commands the manager. With that, the whole group exits leaving the shop unattended except for the accountant who has been able to remain her focus despite all the commotion around her.

Once again I return my thinking to the ways the simulation allows for students interaction, fosters creativity and creative approaches for students and their thinking, and uses the physical environment to support both academic and social learning. I exit the Television Station and make my way to the Greene once more. I am pleased to see a student picking up trash in the area. "Oh, you have customer service?" a friend asks him.

"Dude, it's *commuuuunity* service -- I got a ticket" is the reply.

"Dang." Says the first student.

"Move along please," instructs an officer nearby. It seems he knows his role in real life would be to keep the students separated.

Some sort of Techno music is currently blaring giving the square a sort of crazy energy. A girl stands at the Donation Station carefully reading the mission statements for the organizations. I watch as she places one dollar into Ronald McDonald House tube, and one dollar into the slot for Make-A-Wish. On the opposite end of the square, I note that the mail cart, once again full of mail, has been left unattended, and the female police officer is circling it as if wondering what she should do about it. A medical center employee can be seen walking around with a stethoscope still around his neck. Near me an officer approaches a teacher questioning, "If a person says, oh yeah I'm guilty and then walks away, can that be like resisting arrest?" The teacher asks what the student thinks first then adds, "Maybe you and Shawn (the judge) could decide together, but I'd do it quickly so that it's fair." I assume she means for the student involved in the infraction. At AmeriTowne, students are given a lot of opportunity to solve problems, deal with interpersonal conflicts, and make decisions during the simulation, such as we

have seen in several of the descriptions in the section above as well as in the section that follows.

Extra! Extra! Read all about it. I wander over to “Music Mania” and step inside. The space is small and compact. Along one wall hang large posters of Jimmy Hendrix and The Beatles next to a hand written “Play List” the employees have hung for customers to select song for request. The two disc Jockeys sit behind the glass in the middle of the area. “OMG, we have so many songs to play and I don’t know if we’re going to get to all of them,” says the girl. She sounds disappointed and concerned as she directs this comment to her cohort.

“What if we just started playing halves of songs?” he suggests.

“Maybe,” she replies, “Do we have to charge half as much then?” she seems to realize that it might not be fair to charge full price for half a service. “We better as Colleen first.”

Just outside a student stops abruptly in front of the door in accordance with the law, doing a disco finger dance reminiscent of the dance in the movie *Stayin’ Alive*. A police officer watches on nearby with a smile, “Ma’am,” he says tipping his hat to her as she continues walking.

“Hello, welcome to the Market,” greets a sales person as he motions with his hand for her to enter, but the girl continues on.

In the middle of the Towne Greene a boy pulls a small, wheeled cart filled with newly printed copies of *The Know It News*. “Extra! Extra! Read all about it!” he hollers

holding one copy high overhead, “One dol-lah news-pa-pah sales!” He reminds me of an old time Newsie.

I see a student in the “Parts and Service” shop remove his uniform shirt and hang it on a peg before leaving for his break. Inside a student attempts to read the dipstick from the car, “Jackson, do you know how to read this?” he asks. Jackson moves over and they look at it for a minute or so together, with Jackson pointing to the lines on the metal piece explaining the process to his friend. Another employee struggles with the computer and the jump drives. Jackson, having finished helping the other boy has returned to the computer area where the two boys try once again to extract data from the device with no success. Together they decide they will wait and ask a Robert, their AmeriTowne staff member the next time he checks in, but in the meantime they take another jump drive labeled “Snack Shop, inserting it into the computer. The screen produces a code: A16729. The boys then use a notebook to look up the code, determining that the problem with the vehicle is located in the air filter. They reference the technical notebook, which shows several different types of air filters, and use the diagram to remove and install the new filter. Moving to the model car on the other side of the shop, they carry the notebook with them to complete their task.



The mechanic who had been working checking the oil level has realized the team has a problem. He has started to write up invoices for shops who had dropped off vehicles [jump drives] in the parking lot so far today. “Shoot. We didn’t write which one got brakes. Can more

than one get brakes?” He seems to realize that in the real world not every vehicle might have a different issue.

I am reminded about a comment Jimmy and Barbara made in about the simulation in reference to the adult to student ratio, which is generally very low. By having fewer adults it naturally lessens the ability to provide too much adult supervision and allows for students to make mistakes. As Barbara put it, “Even the problem solving is different if you just let them (the children) be sometimes” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).



To this Jimmy added, “It’s the difference between telling them versus figuring it out on their own...or them finding an error and then knowing what to do to fix it ah-ha!” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). Indeed this situation seems to show just such an example as the boys begin systematically taking each of the jump drives from the hooks and talking about which ones they remember, checking a couple of them with the computer and using a process of elimination to finally determine which invoices required which labels. Once determined and written up, the boy begins delivering the invoices to the other shops’ mailboxes. Meanwhile Jackson has already begun using a tool to tinker with the model car’s tire having retrieved another code from the computer.

“This song is dedicated by Brianna to Jesse,” announces the female DJ as Justin Bieber’s hit *Boyfriend* fills the air. In the far corner of Towne, a boy takes a fall onto the carpet. It is dramatic and elicits cries of, “Ow! Owwww!” as he lies on the ground. Two students

walking with the boy alert the nearby Medical Center of “An accident in Towne.” The boy has made this scenario up but the medical center responds appropriately by sending the ambulance to pick him up. Two girls clad in their dusty blue medical attire help him into the chair, each one supporting one arm of the boy. They wheel him away to treat him.

Diane exits the Investment Center with a student who is the manager. She takes him over to a vacant park bench saying, “These are a surprise,” while handing him an “Employee of the Day” certificate to fill out. The manager fills in a student’s name he has selected and Diane instructs him to put the certificate into the shop’s yellow folder so that he can award this during his final staff meeting back at school.

I watch as several adult guests, and one teenage boy are escorted into Towne and spend some time watching the activities of the students. After a few minutes, they gather in the alcove near the entry doors. They appear to be listening to information that is being presented by a woman in a business suit. I assume she is a representative of the YACFE and that these are the special guests that I was told would be here today. One of the stated intentions of the Young AmeriTowne program is for students to understand charitable giving through lessons that address philanthropy. Students learn about giving of their time, their talents, and their treasures during lessons presented at school and are given the chance to give monetarily during the Day in Towne Simulation where they are able to practice philanthropy in action. Students hear about the missions of each of the partner organizations during the school-based lessons and can also find this information posted at the Donation Station in the Towne square. Different organizations partner with

AmeriTowne each year, and several of the organizations are well known to students, while others appeal to the interests of students even if not previously known. This particular part of the program fosters altruistic actions from these young students encouraging them to give back to the larger community.

As I scan the shops, I see Colleen enter the Market. Here she gives a brief lesson to the accountant on how to make the business deposit. It is a bit more detailed than in the other shops because it must include the cash from the register, the laminated coupons parent volunteers used to get a free snack, the checks and debit card purchases. The accountant looks relieved to have her guidance answering with, “Thank you sooooo much.”

“Of course,” responds Colleen, “We are here to help.”

The student packs all of the monies into a padded zipper pouch used by many stores. She walks it to the bank and I follow behind. Here the teller processes it saying, “We will deposit \$253 dollars in your account. It will be added to your *business* account and we will be sure to credit these coupons too.” As I stand near the doorway watching the transaction, I glance into the Bank’s mailbox. Inside is a postcard a student has purchased from the Parcel Service and mailed to her friend here at the Bank. It reads: “Writing checks gets boring after awhile. Thinking of you.” and the student had signed it with a smiley face. I watch as a few more students drop off business deposits and come to the conclusion the tellers really seem to have come a long way in their confidence and ability to complete transactions as the day has progressed.

Abruptly the music stops playing mid-song. “Attention Young AmeriTowne citizens, sales are now over. Sadly, the Towne is now closed. Do not take off your uniforms, but please finish what you are doing and come and take a seat on the carpet,” DJ Money Maker bellows.

Students begin to make their way to the Towne Greene. As some fidget and squirm, Colleen again gets the students’ attention by using her patterned clapping and waits on the echoed response from the children. Colleen calls for the students’ attention and begins to give some instructions. “You are now going to have five minutes for clean up.” She has produced a laminated card and holds it high for the students to view. “Remember this from this morning?” she questions. She continues,

You are going to flip it over to the side that says “After Towne Closes.” On it you each have some specific instructions of things you need to get done. Please find your job title and do the things that you’ve been assigned so that we can all get cleaned up efficiently. Accountants...where are you?

Several students raise their hands.

Be sure to take your last deposit to the bank with your bank loan check if you haven’t already done that. You can just leave it on the counter. Managers, please give your shop folder to your teachers for them to take those back to school. Also, make sure that any unsold items are returned to the warehouse in the plastic bins. Okay everyone, next time you hear the announcement, you need to come out here with all of your things. Don’t leave *anything* in your shop at that time.

She dismisses the children, and they hurry back to their stores to begin the clean up.

While most of students are busy straightening their respective areas within each shop, a few children can be seen dropping items off at the bank or taking bins back to the warehouse. Within minutes, the Radio Station makes its final announcement for the day, “Attention Young AmeriTowne citizens, it is now time for the closing ceremony. Please bring all your things and come to the center area.”

Thank you for making our community better. The students respond to the request to come to the carpet and settle in quickly. I believe they sense the urgency that time is short and that it is nearly time to leave. I see they have brought their belongings and found a seat on the carpet, Colleen begins, “Boys and girls,” she says, “You are lucky to be here because today is one of the *most* special days of the year here at Ameritowne. Please help me to welcome some *very* special guests,” she continues while motioning toward the group at the back of the room. Students swivel and crane their necks to get a view of the guests and the group begins walking toward the front to stand near Colleen. The Community Relations Director seems to have been prepped on the part he will play in this extra event and stands next to Colleen along with Mayor Seamus. Once the group has assembled in the front, Colleen begins,

Today is the day that we will be giving out the money that has been collected for a *whole year* here at AmeriTowne. That means that all those AmeriTowne dollars that students like you who came here to this site gave at the donation station between June 2012 and June 2013, have been turned into real dollars, and today will be given to the philanthropic organizations represented. Please welcome our representative from the Schlessman Family Foundation who makes this possible

by turning ten cents of every AmeriTowne dollar into real money for our organizations.

A wave is given by one of the adults in the group of visitors. “Now, please give



your attention to your Community Relations Director.”

The Director holds a laminated script in his hand and begins reading from it into the microphone that has been set up for him.

For every ten Young AmeriTowne dollars donated, one REAL dollar is given to charity. Please welcome our guests representing the following charities: The Denver Ronald McDonald House, Denver YMCA, the Denver

Museum of Nature and Science, the Young Philanthropists

foundation, the Denver Zoo, and the Make-A-Wish-Foundation.

As he says each name, a member of the group gives a small wave or takes a step forward to be acknowledged. Once he has read the entire list, he holds his left arm out toward the group and the students give a brief round of applause. Clearing his throat, he continues,

To our non-profit partners, thank you for making our community better. To our Young AmeriTowne citizens, thank you for giving. And to all our other guests, thank you for coming and making this a special day here at Young AmeriTowne.

One by one the boy reads the name of each organization aloud and the representative of the organization is presented with an envelope containing a check. Mayor Seamus shakes each of the individual’s hands and they wait alongside him forming a line in the front of

the room. The representative for the Make-A-Wish foundation is presented with a small plaque indicating they were the charity most often selected by the children and therefore received the most funds this year. Once the presentation of the checks is over, the yearbook photographer snaps a picture of the lot of them, everyone smiling broadly.

While the individual amounts are not disclosed, Colleen does address the group. “Thanks to students like you and your generosity, today we are proud to have given out \$2,425.20⁷ in real money to help others.” She begins clapping and the students’ clap and cheer. As the noise dies down, the group is escorted from the front and they make their way back to the double doors where they exit. I am a bit in awe as I think of fifth grade students donating \$24,252.00 worth of AmeriTowne dollars by choice.

Our customer service All Stars. “Can I please have the Mayor, the Judge, the Community Relations Director, all managers including the editor and the presidents of the Bank and the College to the front?” Colleen inquires. A pack of students stand up from within the seated group and move to take their spots in a line at the front of the room. Colleen requests a round of applause for the Judge for his hard work and fairness, presenting him with a Certificate of Achievement, and then the Judge congratulates the Mayor for, “Being a good leader” patting him on the back as he hands him an award. Again, the students clap and cheer.

The Mayor then takes his turn passing out certificates, calling out the name of each shop, and providing the student leader’s name as he hands over each award making

⁷ At the same time, Young AmeriTowne students at the Belmar location were donating \$22, 335, for a total of \$46,587 Young AmeriTowne dollars, resulting in \$4,658 real dollars (10 cents for every Young AmeriTowne dollar) to be given to local charities.

his way one by one down the line of managers. The students recognize the good work and clap to show their appreciation.

Colleen asks for all accountants to stand, and they do. “Let’s congratulate these guys for all their hard work today too. It’s not an easy job,” she adds, and the students again respond with enthusiastic claps. One of the students takes a bow, while another girl appears to sit down before the announcement is even completed. It seems she does not like the public recognition or attention this job role has garnered.

Next, four of the student managers return to the front of the room with small, colorful, plastic bins in their hands. Colleen asks, “How many of you mailed a postcard today in Towne for one of the contests?” A slew of hands shoot up from the students in the crowd. “You ready to find out the winners?”

“YAAAHHH!” many students respond.

The Television station manager is first up to announce the winner of “The Mind Buster.” “There were a lot of correct answers, so I’m just going to draw one out.” He reaches in his bin proclaiming, “Arleth” as the winner. He lets the students know what the correct answer to the visual puzzle was and why. He presents Arleth with a prize, a blow up microphone. She seems pleased and takes her token to her seat.

The Radio Station manager goes next, reading off the winning joke submitted, “What did the zero say to the eight?...Nice belt!” a few snickers can be heard and a couple of kids turn to friends to explain what the joke means. “That was put in by Hector,” continues the boy. Hector makes his way to the front to retrieve his prize, a blow up guitar.

Next up is the award for the “Trivia Question of the Day,” sponsored by the College. The winning entry was submitted by a girl and asks students to give the correct number of teeth an adult human has. She too receives her prize to the claps of her peers.

Lastly, the Mayor shows the winning submission for the “Postage Stamp Contest.” He holds up the winning entry, a beautifully drawn rendition of a tree frog with topical plants surrounding it that was



submitted by one of the students. He lets the group know that it will remain on display in the parcel service shop on the bulletin board along with, “Lots of other schools’ winners” The student receives his prize and his peers respond with congratulatory applause.

The Community Relations Director takes his turn presenting the findings of his customer service survey. “I asked a lot of you which shop had the best customer service today and the winner is SNACK ATTACK!” he seems excited and a group of students meet him in the front.

“What do you have for them today for winning?” prompts Colleen.

“They get these pins that say ‘All Star,’” he replies, holding one of them between his thumb and forefinger for the students’ benefit even though they cannot possibly see it because it is a small lapel style pin.

“Can I have the Assemblers up here next?” asks Colleen. Three students make their way to the front. “I believe you have something to give out?”

One girl addresses the group, “These are for our teachers,” she begins. “Each shop paid five dollars to us at the Container Shop, and we built these to represent how thankful we are, and what a great year we have had, and for bringing us to AmeriTowne because it’s a lot of work and not a requirement of schools.” The four teachers make their way to the front of the room. One looks as though she is fighting back tears. The students present the lidded, hinged, wooden pencil boxes they have built today in their shop. I can see that each one has been personalized with writing on the bottom. One student has written, “You Cared for Us All Year Mrs. B.” in permanent marker, and it was given to the teary eyed teacher.

This reminds me of a statement Diane made during her interview when she said, “It seems like the students respect their teachers more on Towne Day. Almost like it strikes me like it’s a bond between student and teacher and I see that every once in a while” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013), and I believe I too just witnessed such an event.

As the students’ clapping dies down, Colleen sincerely thanks the students for the



hard work they put in reminding them that the AmeriTowne staff will mail both the business and personal checking account statements to them at the school. She lets them know the managers will still conduct one last staff meeting back at school as well.

Your staff member will probably also write you a note to let you know how you did today. I’m going to be here with this

box, so if you still have any of the AmeriTowne dollars we need you to turn them in here. We reuse those with every group, so please don't keep them.

Finally the staff members flank the alcove near the exit. As students pass by, they bid their farewells, and thank the group for the great work today.

With the students gone, the Towne is once again quiet and the staff finishes their tasks, double checking each shop to be sure it will be ready for the next day's group and another day of excitement and learning.

Response from Young AmeriTowne Staff Members

Response from Colleen Anderson. Email message received Thursday, July 31, 2014. Hi AJ~ Wow! What a great depiction of a day in Young AmeriTowne! I think you covered all of the aspects of a typical day in towne and I don't think there is anything that I would change or edit. Best of luck as you complete this project ☺ Colleen

Response from Diane Roberts. Email message received Tuesday, August 5, 2014. Hi, AJ! Thank you for including me in the email you sent to *Colleen* so I could take a look. You did a wonderful job of captivating a "typical" day in towne. I really enjoyed reading your work and think it's great! Diane

Additional response from Diane Roberts. Email message received Wednesday, August 6, 2014. I forwarded your work on to our development team because they love hearing about all the happenings in towne. They caught an issue with the donation amount - I've included the message below:

Hi *Diane*, please alert the grad student (if other readers didn't already catch the error) that Young AmeriTowne students at the headquarters location donated

\$24,252 Young AmeriTowne dollars to six charities over the school-year. At the same time, Young AmeriTowne students at the Belmar location were donating \$22,335, for a total of \$46,587 Young AmeriTowne dollars, resulting in \$4,658 real dollars (10 cents for every Young AmeriTowne dollar as it says in the script) to charity. *Jane*

Again, I can't thank you enough for giving me the opportunity to read what you've written. It's lovely! Warmly, Diane Roberts.

Note: Change to the donation amount was corrected in Chapter Four, and an email response was sent to Diane and the team thanking them for their input and informing them why I hadn't included the Belmar site information and alerting them that the additional site's information was added as a footnote in Chapter Four.

Response from Barbara Johnson. Email message received Wednesday, August 13, 2014. Hi AJ, I think you've done a fantastic job capturing a day in Towne, and I really enjoyed reading about some of the scenarios you encountered. Those are the things you sometimes miss going shop to shop, and they definitely gave me a chuckle! Here are just two suggestions I have about your observations:

- On pg. 13, another task (that is usually more daunting than the deposits) for the accountants is writing business checks to every business in Towne paying for things like health insurance, advertisements, and etc.. I'm not sure if you want to include this, but I just thought I'd mention it!
- I'm not sure I was present in Towne for the Donation "Ceremony" that happens once a year, but it's typically in the morning during Opening Ceremonies rather

than after Towne closes. Not that it matters, really, but I just wanted to point it out.

Good luck finishing up your report and thanks again! Barbara Johnson

Note: Suggestions from Barbara about the accountants was incorporated into the Chapter Four description as suggested. Additionally, I responded to her regarding the donation ceremony as observed and included here in Chapter Four.

Summary

The previous descriptions were meant to capture my observations and the daily experiences of children as they participated in the Day in Towne simulation. The descriptions were separated into sections and addressed Eisner's (1991, 2002) and Uhrmacher's (1991) dimensions of schooling. The first section, *Intentions*, helped describe the purpose of the AmeriTowne program. The second section, *You've Got to Let a Little Chaos Happen*, highlights the perspective of those who work daily in the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation. The third section *The Young Americans Center*, situates AmeriTowne itself within a larger site and context. The fourth section, *The Contextualized Environment* addressed physical elements of the structural dimension. The final section, *Towne Life*, drew upon structural, curricular, pedagogical and aesthetic dimensions of schooling, illuminating the daily activities of students and staff as they participated in the Day in Towne simulation, and was comprised of composite vignettes.

Next, in Chapter Five, I will discuss the findings gleaned from my study. I will present themes that emerged throughout my descriptions and will answer my research

questions. I will also present the reader with implications for education in general, provide programmatic recommendations, and proffer ideas for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEMATICS, EVALUATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the AmeriTowne program supported learning and incorporated 21st century knowledge and skills development for fifth graders through participation in an experiential simulation. This study sought to understand the experiences of children participating in the AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation and determined what can be learned from such a practice. Eisner and Uhrmacher's dimensions of schooling served as a conceptual framework. By describing, interpreting, and appraising the intentions and operations of AmeriTowne, I hoped to shed light on the program and emphasize the importance of contextualized learning in the field of elementary education.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, today's educators are faced with preparing students for an increasingly rapidly changing world (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). In order for students to have the preparation needed to further their education, be considered workforce ready and to take their place as global citizens and leaders, schools must address learning in ways that combine a blending of both knowledge, and skills, moving from what students *know*, to what students will be able to *do* with information (Dede, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Despite knowing this, many schools remain static, employing approaches that are obsolete and teacher centered, as

well as emphasizing de-contextualized and fragmented learning. The current trends in education include the 21st century initiatives put forth by the P21 Organization to meet the present and future needs of our nation's learners. Among these is the call for schools to restructure classroom learning experiences through the use of authentic activities that allow for collaborative inquiry rather than teaching information in the absence of application and context, as well as the broadening of knowledge and skills categories to include competencies deemed necessary for success both in and out of school settings. An emphasis on authentic learning employing constructivist approaches, such as experiential education and situated learning can help develop self-directed and independent learners who can access and use a wide range of cognitive structures in order to transfer learning to contexts they have yet to encounter (Kerka, 1997). Using experiential simulations can help achieve the goal of supporting student learning and skills development by providing opportunities for social interaction, negotiation of shared meaning, the use of problem solving strategies, and the application of knowledge and skills in an authentic context (Gredler, 2004).

After reviewing the literature, I created five research questions:

1. What are the intentions of the AmeriTowne program?
2. What conditions does the AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation provide for educational experience?
3. Which aspects of the AmeriTowne's Day in Towne simulation participation facilitate students developing and utilizing 21st century knowledge and skills?

4. What is the educational importance for those involved in the AmeriTowne program?
5. How are AmeriTowne's theories and practices applicable in K-12 classrooms across the nation?

To research these questions, and as discussed in Chapter Three, this study utilized the qualitative methodology of Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism. The AmeriTowne program's headquarters site was selected for the purposes of this study. Data collection included fourteen days of observation during the Day in Towne simulation, formal interviews with staff members working within the AmeriTowne program, as well as document analysis and artifact review. As Eisner (1991) asserts, prior to making recommendations for change, it is "important to try to understand how teachers and classrooms function" (p.11). As such, qualitative inquiry allows for contextual understanding, first by knowing "particular classrooms and particular teachers in particular schools" (Eisner, 1991, p.11) or in this case a particular program. Using the information obtained from these particulars, ideas can be extracted and applied to other situations and therefore be used to guide positive change and inform future research.

Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism, developed by Elliot Eisner, seeks to improve educational practices and is comprised of two parts: connoisseurship and criticism. From the Latin *cognooscere*, "to know", connoisseurship then is a form of knowing; a heightened form of knowing that comes from both experience and a sensitivity to what is being observed. Eisner describes knowledge as generated rather than discovered, constructed upon that which we have come to understand through our

previous experiences, heightened perceptivity, and interactions with others (Eisner, 1991). It is the art of appreciation and relies heavily on discernment. Criticism, in this context, is to illuminate a situation or object so that it can be seen or appreciated by others (Eisner, 1991). Eisner makes it clear that criticism is not negative in nature, but rather it brings to light a more thorough understanding of both positive and negative attributes so that a judgment of its value can be made. By combining these two facets, the researcher helps the reader understand the data collected and apply the knowledge gained to other educational practices.

While connoisseurship is marked by observation, criticism is composed of four dimensions: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics (Eisner, 1991; 2002). Chapter Four consists of the criticism of one program's experiential simulation and employs thick description focused on the experiences and activity of students and staff, their intentions, and the learning environment. I created a composite narrative composed of vignettes that related a typical day in Towne. A conceptual framework of Eisner (1991, 2002) and Uhrmacher's (1991) dimensions of schooling helped create themes that emerged from the data collected through observation, interview, document analysis, and artifact review. Undergirding the process of interpretation in Chapter Four were two of Eisner's questions: "What does the situation mean to those involved?" and "How does this classroom operate?" (Eisner, 2002, p. 229). Interpretation was woven throughout the descriptions. In this study, evaluation was concerned with the value of the experiences of individuals involved in the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation. Chapter Four addressed the advantages and challenges found within this setting. The current chapter

responds to Eisner's fourth dimension of an educational criticism, namely thematics, and makes use of his third guiding question "What ideas, concepts, or theories can be used to explain its major features? (Eisner, 2002, p. 229).

Discussion of Themes and Response to Research Questions

My data collection was based on five of the dimensions of schooling: intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical (Eisner, 1991; 2002), and aesthetic (Uhrmacher, 1991). While these dimensions guided my study, they were not exclusive, meaning I allowed the possibility for other observations or themes to emerge. The application of the related literature also influenced my interpretation. The themes that emerged from this study will be discussed in the response to the research questions that follow. The themes I use are terms that I have assigned to encapsulate what I had observed. Throughout Chapter Four, I continually returned my thinking to the following ideas. There are seven themes, and they are as follows: the interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic, physical, schematic, creative and altruistic elements.

For this study, the *interpersonal* element encompassed skills that one uses to interact with others. Conversely, the *intrapersonal* referred to language or thought occurring within the individual. *Academic* is the term I used to describe subject or content knowledge employed by students. The *physical* for this study encompassed the environment and materials students experienced. *Schematic* focused on background knowledge, experience, or preconceived ideas. The *creative* element implied the use of creativity in the form of ideas and actions. Finally, the *altruistic* encompassed acts that had been undertaken with no expectation of anything in return.

Question #1: What are the intentions of the Young AmeriTowne program?

This research question focused on the goals of the program and considered the intentions from several different standpoints: from a historical standpoint, as currently outlined by the Young Americans Center for Financial Education, and as they have been interpreted and expanded upon by individuals working within various roles of the AmeriTowne program. As related in Chapter Four, interviews were conducted with staff members and artifacts were reviewed in order to determine and understand the intentions. I concluded that intentions generally fell within three main categories: academic or scholastic intentions, social intentions, and personal intentions.

The YACFE was created in response to a need for local youth to have access and education around financial topics and services. Prominently posted at the YACFE is the mission statement of: “To further the economic education of young people so they will be competent and knowledgeable in managing their financial affairs and may prosper in the free enterprise system.” Because this statement is quite broad and the YACFE serves several purposes and has multiple programs it oversees, I delved further to determine the intentions specific to the AmeriTowne program. The AmeriTowne program’s simulation strives to “provide a hands-on lesson in free enterprise.” In discussing the intentions with Mr. Williams (the Vice President of Programming), he stated:

So the mission is really to provide students with an experiential opportunity within a free enterprise system so they know kind of both sides of the supply and demand model and they understand kind of good financial literacy habits like saving and managing a budget. And so what our hope for with Young

AmeriTowne specifically, is that they walk away understanding that you have to earn money, you have a job, there are different levels of jobs based on /off your responsibility, and you have a personal income, you will also work for a business and that business will have an income and that the way they get an income is by selling products or services. And so they will understand as a team kind of that they have to work together to sell their products and services and then at the end of the experience they will have had to have managed their money throughout the experience so at the end they can see personally how did I do as a member of this economy, but also as a member of a business team how did we do? So they get both statements to be able to look at that and to see what it means to earn and what it means to save and to manage money. (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

Here Mr. Williams brought forth multiple intentions including some pertaining to academic elements such as supply and demand, and others that involve students working with others, such as teamwork.

Academic/Scholastic intentions. Consonance was found among all staff members interviewed in regard to the academic intentions assigned to the AmeriTowne program in general, as well as to the Day in Towne simulation as referenced above. Academic elements included acknowledgement of the import of economic concepts, financial literacy, banking procedures, and advertising. The AmeriTowne Day in Towne staff members took the idea of academics further by specifically adding the use of mathematics for accountants and writing skills for those students assigned to work the

newspaper during the simulation. I believe all of the vignettes included in the composite found in Chapter Four demonstrate that these academic elements indeed played a large role in the students' activity and experience during the simulation.

Social intentions. An additional area of agreement between all staff members was the idea that the Day in Towne simulation should support students in the realms of teamwork and cooperation. Throughout Chapter Four, the vignettes demonstrate that students were working together and frequently participated in joint decision making ventures.

Commonalities were also found in the intentions of all staff members in regard to the possibility of students making mistakes. All but one of the staff members discussed the importance of the simulated environment serving the purpose of providing a space for students to make mistakes safely or with minimal consequences. These mistakes could manifest in technical errors, such as a problem with math, spelling or specific aspects of the student's job in Towne or could take the form of a mistake in behavior either attached to the student's job in Towne or to another interpersonal element. While expressed in different ways according to the individual, all staff members viewed mistakes in a potentially positive light especially if students reflected on this mistake and changed future behavior. For example, Mr. Williams expressed,

I really think that giving kids the opportunity to make mistakes and do that in an open environment is very, very important. This is a safe environment; they can overdraft their account and they can learn why that is not a good thing. (Personal Communication, July 3, 2013)

Mr. Williams, Jimmy, Barbara, and Colleen expressed that a positive element provided to the students via the simulation is that learners can make mistakes, respond to their mistakes, and that these errors will not have detrimental consequences as they would later in life. I am reminded about comments Jimmy and Barbara made about the simulation in reference to the adult to student ratio, which was generally very low. By having fewer adults it naturally lessened the ability to provide too much adult supervision and allowed for students to make mistakes. As Barbara put it, “Even the problem solving is different if you just let them (the children) be sometimes” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

To this Jimmy added, “It’s the difference between telling them versus figuring it out on their own...or them finding an error and then knowing what to do to fix it, ah-ha!” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). Indeed, situations such as that found in the vignettes, *I Can Take Whoever’s Next*, when the girl at Blue Sky U forgot to have her customer pay, but finally figured it out and then remedied it, or the example in *Extra! Extra! Read All About It*, where the boys realized they had not kept track of their work then began systematically taking each of the jump drives from the hooks, talking about which ones they remembered, checking a couple of them with the computer and using a process of elimination to finally determine which invoices required what labels, are both good examples. Interviews helped me to determine that all staff viewed mistakes in a potentially positive light especially when students used this to reflect and make a change in behavior. The staff members working with students during the Day in Towne simulation took this idea one step further, adding the idea of risk taking to a shared goal

for the simulation. Collectively, they believed that risk taking was an important element because students who took risks, even when this resulted in mistakes became more open to learning. As Jimmy put it “You have to be willing to put yourself out there. I think that one of the biggest parts of the day is being able to take the risks here” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). The idea of risk taking supports Castronova (2000) thinking,

Among the benefits to student learning in a simulation rather than a real life situation is that time and / or the environment can be manipulated to guide discovery and risk-taking because the impact of failing within a simulation is minimal while the potential for learning remains high. (p.5)

AmeriTowne provides a situation where the environment has been manipulated to provide students with a realistic representation to its real-world counterpart, but where students are able to act without severe consequences therefore promoting experimentation and risk taking in their learning.

Personal intentions. While Mr. Williams oversees the AmeriTowne program and spends some time in the Towne occasionally, he does not work during the simulation on a day-to-day basis. Mr. Williams’ stated intentions diverted a bit from those of other staff members, as seen in some of his comments in Chapter Four where he discussed elements such as the need for the program to maintain relevance through the mirroring of state content standards and the ability for the program’s lesson sequence to fit within the scope of an individual teacher’s practice and schedule. Therefore, I determined it is possible that one reason for differences in intentions might stem from the roles that the staff members play within the organization.

For example, one shared intention the Day in Towne staff held was in regard to the element of fun that they believed should accompany the students' day in Towne. While common to those working with the students during the simulation, it was not explicitly stated nor eluded to during my conversation with Mr. Williams. This was shown directly through Barbara's comment of "I think that ultimately I hope that every group who comes here has fun." Barbara's comment about fun was reinforced through comments made by Colleen and Diane, but perhaps Jimmy stated it best when he said,

I agree that fun is a big aspect- it helps- I don't know if it's 100% necessary to have fun, but ultimately if they are having fun, and they are learning something along the way I hope that as well. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

It is as if Jimmy knows fun is not a stated intention of the organization or program but personally sees the merit of it regardless.

Additionally, I determined that individual's backgrounds may play a role in the ways that they formulated the intentions they had when working with the children. For example, when Diane spoke of an intention she had—to decrease anxiety and stress for students, which was also evident in the way she approached her role during the simulation—she had shared with me that this was due in large part with herself having issues in this realm and not wanting students to grow up with the same trouble.

Similarly, in regard to Barbara's comment above about fun, her comment may have been influenced by her own experience with learning the financial and economic topics emphasized in the program, because at some point she had also said, "I think financially literacy is really not that taught in the first place, I think to begin with, but especially in

my experience when I've learned things like that it's like boring...economics...ehh"
(Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

Jimmy used his personal experience with the ways that people learn to determine that for him an important aim of the program can be to reach learners who require an alternative approach, saying,

I think a lot of times the kids that get into it and have to feel it and do it before they know it, they are kind of left out sometimes or a little behind in the school system, so this is something that would help out these kids. Other kids can just sit there and listen, like myself I could just sit there and listen but I know other people, like my friend Tom, he couldn't just sit there, he would need to do it.

(Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

As we see from the above examples, the program strives to support academic, social, and often times, personal goals of staff members. Both commonalities and differences were found among individuals, but overall the aims of the program and the intentions of the individuals working within the program were in agreement and supported the learning of the students during their time in Towne. Through review of the program's stated intentions as well as through conversation with Mr. Williams and other staff members, I ultimately also concluded that the three types of intentions served two distinct purposes: one of present intentional orientation for the students experience during their day in Towne, as well as a second aim in the form of intentions to be applied in the children's futures.

Question #2: What conditions does the AmeriTowne program's Day in Towne simulation provide for educational experience?

This research question focused on the operational curriculum and considered structural, curricular, pedagogical and aesthetic dimensions of the Day in Towne simulation. I determined there to be many things happening simultaneously, all worthy of attention. In order to answer this question, I formulated several sub-questions: What is the environment like? What are students doing? What types of activities are students undertaking? How is the learning being supported? While examples are plentiful, in fact, in most cases too numerous to include here, I have selected a few prominent exemplars from Chapter Four to use as support for each of the following themes.

Physical elements. First, we will look at the physical environment of the Towne. Through the descriptions provided in Chapter Four, we see that the contextualized environment (the Towne) adds a unique element to the simulation. Whereas some types of simulations, particularly those that are computer based also employ a micro-world, a live simulation such as AmeriTowne, with its unique form of contextualization, takes it a step further. Not only were students thinking about concepts, they were immersed in a physical environment that transported them to the place where the knowledge, skills, and interactions and were applied. The physical aspects of the contextualized environment (the shops, the furnishings, the uniforms, the materials) added an extra element of authenticity for students and allowed them to credibly consider their role as they also became a functional and integral part of the environment and activities that were taking place.

As noted in many of the vignettes in Chapter Four, students moved beyond thinking about the physical environment, to being convinced by it. As Mr. Williams had said, “It gives students the chance to realistically see what it will be like when they walk into their first job.”

Jimmy had this to say about it,

It makes it more conducive (to learning). It adds excitement to the day and it makes them think more about their environment. What it would look like to work inside a shop like that kind of – I don’t maybe want to say it inspires them, but it ya know makes them feel like they are legitimately doing something. It gives them an air of professionalism. It makes them think more about it and what goes into, say, whatever job it is. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

While the examples are numerous, they are particularly strong in the vignettes found in *Your Honor We’ve Got a Runner*, those taking place in the Snack Shop and the Medical Center found in *Can We Fix You? Yes We Can!*, as well as in *Sunny Storms*. The vignette from the Towne Hall clearly showed that the Judge, the News Reporter and the Police Officers were all embracing the roles they had adopted. We can see this through the way they addressed one another such as “Your Honor” or “Mr. Mayor”, the way they approached their job roles and the subsequent actions they embraced these as having. For example, the student being ticketed asked for a witness and the officer allowed him to accompany them to the court to plead his case. The judge decided to find students guilty, dismiss cases, or impose community service based on what he believed was fair. He believed he had the power to make these decisions as judges would in the adult world.

Similarly, the news reporter flashed his press pass to gain entrance to the Towne Hall. In the Medical Center, the female patient embraced her role as a sick patient, and the health technicians followed her lead. The doctor took on a role that realistically considered the ways physicians and patients interact. Additionally, the news reporter created a fictional and clever name for herself during the newscast. None of the above examples were included in information students received about how to interact in Towne. It occurred naturally because the environment encouraged and supported it. These samples highlight an element of the contextualized environment that I noted with great frequency, that students took on personas and engaged in a great deal of role play.

Shaftel and Shaftel (1967) define role-play as "spontaneous improvisation."

Further, they state that role play is a

group problem-solving method involving (1) initial enactment of proposals (taking of roles), (2) observer reaction to the enactments (discussion), (3) exploration of alternatives through further enactments and discussion, and often (4) the drawing of conclusions or generalization and decision-making. (p. 83-84)

This was also a point that Jimmy and Diane had made when asked about the part the physical environment plays in the simulation, "I think it does a good job of really making them feel like they buy into it more instead of just like hey now I'm a newspaper person...to make them feel I AM a newspaper person" (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013). Similarly, Diane had explained it as, "It makes it more realistic to them and they take their role in Towne maybe more seriously, in a more literal way" (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013).

This idea of students finding their role to be credible, is also supported by Gredler (2004) who says,

A related essential requirement, a key feature of the deep structure (of a simulation) is the experience of functioning in a bona fide role and encountering the consequences of one's actions in the execution of that role. This characteristic is referred to by Jones (1984, 1987) as "reality of function", and it includes the thoughts of participants as well as their actions or words. That is, "A chairman really is a chairman with all the power, authority, and duties to complete the task." (p. 573)

Schematic elements. At times students considered schema through the way they approached their role prior to their participation in the simulation. Examples of this can be found in the police officer who created a badge holder, the students who added information such as manager, to protect and serve, or serving since 2013 on their name tags, and the students who arrived in some form of costume (mustache, suit, high heels). The teller who brought complimentary gifts for customers was another terrific example. Throughout Chapter Four, students can be seen acting in ways they have experienced in life adding observed elements to their behavior and decision-making in the Towne. The examples to support the idea of schema are numerous and some aspect of role-playing and background knowledge can be found within each of the vignettes in Chapter Four.

The importance of prior or everyday experiences is a value underlying constructivist learning environments, in that individual beliefs and experiences provide the uniquely personal framework for new understanding. Background knowledge and experience form the conceptual referent from which new knowledge is organized and assimilated (Piaget, 1976). Integrating new knowledge with existing conceptions is assumed to result in more meaningful learning (Mayer, 1984).

In turning to what the students are doing during the Day in Towne simulation, I found that students were involved in many forms of interaction, both interpersonal and

intrapersonal, and were using academic knowledge and creative skills and ideas through their tasks and roles in the simulation. Additionally, they were exposed to elements that encouraged altruistic actions.

Interpersonal elements. Interpersonal elements in this study encompassed the skills that one uses to interact with others. Among these were ways that students collaborated, cooperated, used peer teaching strategies, and used verbal and written communication. From my perspective, examples abound throughout Chapter Four showing that students rarely worked in isolation rather they spent much of their time working together in small groups. The simulation hinged on students working together toward a common goal, and each action and interaction changed the course of the simulation throughout the day. From the very beginning of their time in Towne, students could be seen working jointly, speaking, making decisions, and aiding one another with tasks and information. A few good examples of this from Chapter Four follow.

Students used collaboration heavily during the simulation as seen in all of the vignettes in Chapter Four. The vignette, *Hey Look at Me!*, featured joint decision making such as when the students in the print shop decided together on where to place the products they had for sale, or when students were seen collaborating to determine what to do when faced with a problem such as returning or requesting products from the Warehouse. Students used collaboration when determining shop names, slogans and deciding on goals for their shops as well and when to change their prices. Additionally, collaboration was prevalent in the vignette *Sunny Storms*, when the television crew

worked together to create their own newscast, combining several students' ideas and working together to achieve a final product.

An example of cooperation in action was seen during set up when the students at the Radio Station worked together to determine if the volume was accurate, or later in the day when the boy was struggling with the mailbox and enlisted two other students to help complete this task, who in turn, readily obliged. Students showed cooperation in the way that they supported each other or took over one another's roles when students were out on break. As stated, the entire simulation hinged on elements of teamwork and cooperation, in order to proceed smoothly.

I witnessed several examples of peer teaching as evidenced in Chapter Four. At times the students instructed each other with procedural knowledge, such as when the police officer showed her friend how to fill out the ticket in *It's A Great Day at AmeriTowne*. Similarly, in *Extra! Extra! Read All About It!* one mechanic sought help from a friend on how to read an oil level. Other times students aided one another with academic knowledge such as when the Judge instructed a fellow student on how to fill out a check in *Your Honor We've Got a Runner*.

Many constructivists emphasize the socially mediated aspects of learning such as those related in the examples above, and believe that through exploration, interpretation and negotiation, understanding is deepened as multiple perspectives are considered (Jonassen & Land, 2000). Constructivist approaches may use teacher-student, or student-student interactions to model or scaffold reflection and performance, and such varied

perspectives from others can be coordinated to form a knowledge base from which learners evaluate and negotiate varied sources of meaning (Hill & Land, 1998).

Verbal and written communication between staff and students was also evident during the Day in Towne simulation. Students applied written communication through the use of announcements, advertisements, or comments written on wipe boards. In the vignette, *I Can Take Whoever's Next*, the Bank President created written steps for his tellers to follow to accurately complete a deposit. Students needed to communicate in written form, and read these communications via the documents sent, mailed and received from shop to shop. Using written communication was also a part of many of the students' jobs. For example, the newspaper staff was required to record stories and produce a newspaper. Students working for the Utility company and the Parts and Service shop used technical manuals with written and pictorial directions to complete their jobs. Accountants followed step by step directions for their job in creating deposits for the bank, as did employees in the Container Shop to build briefcases and pencil boxes. Verbal communication was involved in transactions between students, and when students were advertising. Students spent a limited time working in isolation therefore communication was encouraged and used to support both the simulation and the learning as can be seen throughout Chapter Four.

Intrapersonal elements. While the interpersonal was prevalent in the examples above, aspects of the intrapersonal were also evident. The intrapersonal for this study referred to language or thought occurring within the individual. At times, this manifested in the form of perceived or stated motivation, or through elements of risk taking

witnessed, spontaneity of thought or action, and still other times, I was able to see this through students self talk once verbalized.

A few examples of the self talk can be seen in Chapter Four when the female police officer is ticketing the boy and instead of writing the actual time 11:27, looked at the clock for a few moments before saying, “I’m just going to put 11:30.” Another example can be found in the vignette, *We Want a Refund!*, when the manager and accountant were speaking in the Container Shop regarding the account balance. The manager’s comment of, “But wait! We sold all our briefcases!” showed he was thinking through the problem and had come to the conclusion that it didn’t make sense they would be struggling with a negative account balance, which ultimately resulted in him asking the accountant if he might double check his own work for accuracy. Other students also demonstrated the idea of thinking aloud or self talk, such as the judge when he expressed, “I’m not exactly sure what to do with these circumstances” before deciding on asking further questions and then determining a student innocent and not ticketing him, or when the mechanic said, “Can more than one car get brakes?” indicating his thoughts surrounding real world application versus simply the simulation. Yet another example of thought through self talk would be when the student at the park bench was talking aloud to himself saying, “Do I have everything...” before moving on to shop in the Towne.

Several of the vignettes feature students undertaking spontaneous actions. At times these were in response to another student’s actions, and sometimes a student added a new element to the simulation through spontaneous choices. Examples of this can be found in the vignette *It’s A Great Day at AmeriTowne* when the police officer responded

to the ambulance drivers' request to move the crowd of students or in *Extra! Extra! Read All About It* when students responded to the boy's choice to create an accident in Towne that the Medical Center responded to. In several instances in Chapter Four, students could be seen responding to stimuli such as the music, by dancing, clapping or singing.

Bozionelos (1996) relates that spontaneity often accompanies a disposition of playfulness, and suggests that spontaneous actions can manifest joy, sense of humor, elements of socialization, or simply be physical in nature. Several of the preceding examples suggest these ideas. Additionally, he uses the term "cognitive spontaneity" to describe inventiveness leading to one's testing of behavioral hypotheses, where an individual often makes a choice of behavior in order to ascertain whether an if-then relationship may occur. According to him, such behavior often occurs as a result of a novel situation. In the cases above, students spontaneously created new elements such as an accident in Towne, supporting Bozionelos' idea that students were interested in finding out what would happen following their behavior.

Motivation and risk taking demonstrated other forms of the intrapersonal element of the simulation. Perhaps the best example of motivation was when the Tiffany, the news reporter stated, "I've always wanted to do this!" in response to the group's plan to create their own newscast in the vignette, *Sunny Storms*. Constructivism supports the idea that students should not only be allowed to pursue learning that would naturally occur in an educational sequence, but supports the idea that students should also be encouraged to self-determine what items are of interest and worth learning or doing, thus providing motivation (Jonassen & Land, 2000). In the previous example, Sunny is motivated by the

task of participating in a televised newscast that has been spurred by the contextualized environment.

Risk taking was evident in this study, in so much as students were continually asked to try new things or at times move beyond their visible comfort levels. Chapter Four highlights this in the section entitled, *Whose Towne Is It?*, when the nervous police officer who expressed he did not want to take an oath, was forced to step out of his comfort zone and required take this risk in the Opening Ceremony, as well as in *Who Ya Gonna Call?* when students appeared nervous or giggly in response to needing to be filmed on camera for the commercials. In general, the simulation asked students to make decisions, often times with no idea how the choices might turn out, which for a number of students can result in discomfort due to uncertainty. Barbara addressed this during her interview when she discussing the difference between in school learning and the simulation in regard to student response to the format of the latter.

I also think because it's not like school it kind of forces them to – it is different for them from school you know, they are kind of forced to make that connection with ok, this isn't school, it's a different kind of experience. There's a lot of kids who have succeeded in school, in the school environment because they are really good at following directions. Like a teacher tells them what to do- they do it very well and so they succeed, but in AmeriTowne while we do give directions there is also a lot of chance for them to explore and create and do things their own way. And a lot of kids just don't do that well. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

Academic elements. While the simulation supported the use of interpersonal and intrapersonal elements, it was also a strong support for academic elements as well.

Academic elements in the simulation moved well beyond the intended pieces: financial literacy, economic concepts like supply and demand and banking concepts that the YACFE originally outlined for the AmeriTowne program. As seen in the examples above, mathematics, reading, writing, health, informal and formal verbal communication skills, and listening were all supported through the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation as evidenced through the vignettes presented to readers in Chapter Four. Question three of this study, that follows, will further address ideas related to additional 21st century academic knowledge and personal skills supported by the simulation.

Creative elements. Another aspect of the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation is that it provided creative elements to students. In addition to creative role playing, and the formation of personas addressed above, students engaged in creativity through the formation of slogans, shop names, creating advertisements, signs, and commercials. These tasks allowed students to engage in creative thinking, use their imagination and use artistic skills.

In Chapter Four's *Who Ya Gonna Call?* students created commercials that showed examples of ways students used creativity for their shop names, slogans, video, and radio advertisements. Several of the other vignettes in Chapter Four also gave examples of ways that students used creativity in their sales advertising, such as in *A View From the Greene*, where I gave examples of some of the print advertisements submitted to the newspaper, as well as in *Can We Fix You? Yes We Can!* where the

student advertised “pocket pets” using the sales pitch of, “You look like a lonely guy” with his potential customer. Franken (2002) defines creativity as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others, and we can see that AmeriTowne mirrors this definition through the examples provided in Chapter Four.

These examples are also supported by Cremin, Burnard and Craft (2006) who suggest that when children are given some control over their learning and are supported to take risks with the right balance between structure and freedom, that creativity is enhanced. Additionally supported is (Addison et. al’s, 2010) belief that the context of learning activities (such as that offered at AmeriTowne) often stimulates children’s creativity.

Altruistic elements. AmeriTowne provides students with the opportunity to practice altruism as well. Altruistic elements in this study encompassed acts that had been undertaken by students with no expectation of gaining anything in return. Hodge (2008) terms this particular form, one-way altruism. Chapter Four highlights typical students supporting those with special needs, such as in the vignette, *Hey Look At Me!* and again in *Who Ya Gonna Call?* In *Extra! Extra! Read All About It!*, a student sent a friend a postcard saying “Writing checks gets boring after awhile. Thinking of you,” to brighten her day. Perhaps the best example of altruism can be seen through the generosity of students as evidenced by their donations to charity. In Chapter Four, several instances described when students carefully considered and then decided to donate their own AmeriTowne dollars, or sometimes business profits, to various philanthropic groups. The

vignette, *Thank You For Making Our Community Better*, details the presentation of checks to community organizations and demonstrated that students thinking beyond themselves was a prevalent practice found within the AmeriTowne program. While the students will likely never see the donations in action, they had elected to donate their money without any consideration of receiving anything in return. Hodge (2008) breaks down the practice of altruism into components where the giver's attention is drawn to someone else's need, followed by the giver evaluating the situation to determine what should be done and by whom, and finally by action, where the giver commits to his response. Students' awareness to other's needs becomes heightened through the exposure provided by AmeriTowne, and help students to determine that they are able to help through the means of their AmeriTowne donations, ultimately resulting in the students committing to the giving of their money to the specified organizations during the Day in Towne simulation.

Support for the learning. In consideration of how learning is being supported for students during the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation, this brings us to the point that the simulation served as a connection, an authentic form of creating relevance for skills and learning. Constructivist instructional practices, and those that allowed for students to experience a genuine context to apply and use information, skills, and concepts through situated learning in an experiential environment were supporting learning. Herrington and Oliver (2000) have presented a framework for the design of learning environments to support situated learning. Namely situated learning can be supported through environments that provide: (1) authentic contexts that reflect the way

the knowledge will be used in real life; (2) authentic activities; (3) expert performances and the modeling of processes; (4) multiple roles and perspectives; (5) support for the collaborative construction of knowledge; (6) the ability for learners to reflect thus enabling abstractions to be formed; (7) articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit; (8) coaching and scaffolding by the teacher at critical times; and (9) authentic assessment of learning within the tasks. These elements are evident in the AmeriTowne simulation through the narrative provided. I will elaborate briefly on each providing examples from Chapter Four.

The AmeriTowne simulation addressed authentic context as it provided a physical environment which reflected the way the knowledge would ultimately be used through the creation of the Towne, which while specifically constructed for children, preserved the complexity of a real-life setting with “rich situational affordances” (Collins, 1988; Brown et al., 1989; Young & McNeese, 1993). This design makes little attempt to overly simplify the environment and makes no attempt to fragment components of learning. The authentic activities of students could be seen in the way that students were using the authentic task (the running of shops in a real time economy), which had real world relevance yet still highlighted a complex task that was ill-defined (Jonassen, 1991). This task allowed students to collaborate, integrate across subject areas and apply both previous knowledge and new skills, while detecting relevant versus irrelevant information.

Access to expert performances and modeling of processes was evident in the various levels of expertise students possessed and shared (Brown et al. 1989; Lave &

Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1993;), coupled with the proficiency the adults aiding in the Towne possessed. Additionally, students had access to their own social periphery and observation of real-life episodes prior to their participation in the simulation through the life experiences they had encountered in similar situations. These multiple perspectives and points of view were afforded through the abundant opportunities for collaboration (Spiro et al., 1991). This approach supported the collaborative construction of knowledge because the tasks involved in the running of the Towne were often addressed by the group versus the individual (Resnick, 1987; Alessi, 1996) as can be seen by the organization of small groups or pairs of students working within the structure of the simulation that incentivized whole group achievement as well (Hooper, 1992).

The Day in Towne simulation promoted reflection and allowed students to act upon their reflections, making changes to their choices or behavior. At times students compared themselves to other experts (adults, more competent students, life experiences) or in response to collaborative feedback from others. This articulation of tacit knowledge made explicit, encouraged collaborative and social learning then individual understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). Adults provided scaffolding and coaching at critical times, yet the majority of the simulation employed a complex, open-ended learning environment that supported collaborative learning, scaffolding, and peer coaching (Collins, 1988; Collins et al. 1989; Young, 1993). Finally, the simulation provided an integration of assessment within the learning tasks as the students could evaluate effectiveness of their performances and they used a wide array of learning tasks that were naturally integrated within the activity of the students (Wiggins, 1993).

Question #3: Which aspects of the AmeriTowne's Day in Towne simulation participation facilitate students developing and utilizing 21st Century knowledge and skills?

This research question focused again on the operational curriculum relying on the structural, curricular, pedagogical, and aesthetic dimensions of the Day in Towne simulation as they related specifically to students' development and utilization of 21st century knowledge and skills. This question built off of Question Two, considering additional aspects of students' experience at AmeriTowne through this added lens. Once again, I determined there to be many things happening that exposed children to 21st century knowledge and skills, many that went well beyond any intentions stated by the AmeriTowne program. Again, in order to answer this question, I returned to the following sub-questions: What is the environment like? What are students doing? What types of activities are students undertaking? How is the learning being supported? While there is some overlap at times between the examples provided above in question two, there are distinct ways that the AmeriTowne program helps to develop 21st century knowledge and skills and supports student growth in these areas.

Proponents of the 21st century initiatives emphasize that in order to be prepared for post-secondary life, including college and career that students require a new mix of skills that involves higher levels of thinking, the ability to apply knowledge (both known and newly acquired), use complex communication, be creative, and utilize leadership abilities (P21, 2006; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). When considering what the AmeriTowne environment is like, it is evident from the vignettes

provided in Chapter Four that it is an excellent avenue for supporting such goals. In order to address the specific ways that the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation supports 21st century knowledge and skills development, we can first look at what the students were doing and consider the activities they were undertaking.

Learning and innovation skills: Interpersonal and intrapersonal development. Students can be seen using what P21 terms learning and innovation skills. These skills address demands that are presented to students, and in turn, allow students to be self-reliant and have the ability to be lifelong learners because they can adapt to changing situations. When students ask and answer important questions, critically review what others say, pose solutions to solve problems, communicate and create new knowledge and ideas, they are developing learning and innovation skills (P21, 2009). AmeriTowne specifically supports a number of skills outlined by P21. They are communication and collaboration, as addressed above in Question Two, as well as innovation, creative thinking, and problem solving.

AmeriTowne supports creative thinking, problem solving, and innovation insofar as students' created new and worthwhile ideas using a broad range of techniques both independently and in groups. For example, we see in Chapter Four that students created business names, slogans, advertisements for radio and television, and decided on how to display and sell their products during their time in Towne, all of which required them to use creative thinking skills. Another aspect of developing such skills occurred when students were also able to evaluate their own ideas along the way in order to improve and maximize their endeavors, and because of the open-ended nature of the simulation,

students were able to make these types of changes at any point in the day if they chose to. At various points during the AmeriTowne lesson sequence as well as during the Day in Towne simulation, students had the opportunity to develop, implement and communicate creative ideas to others, incorporate group input and feedback, and were often asked to remain open to diverse ideas and perspectives. All of these ideas support P21 (2009) goals for students' development of learning and innovation skills.

Additionally, AmeriTowne supports P21's (2009) learning and innovation skills of critical thinking and problem solving. These emphasize that students acquire the ability to reason effectively, make judgments or decisions and solve problems in both conventional and innovative ways. Chapter Four's vignette, *Whose Towne Is It?*, highlights students in the Sign and Print Shop using critical thinking as they determined the ways they will display and sell their products, such as when the students decided to place products close to them at their work station so they would not have to get up and stop working to make a sale. Students often needed to problem solve when it came to a conflict, such as when the team in *Sign Me Up* could not accurately fill the television station's order and provided an alternate solution, or in the vignette *Sunny Storms* when the students decided to create their own billing system for a shop that did not turn in a payment. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, creativity and problem solving require students to reason effectively using inductive and deductive approaches depending on the situation, and to analyze how parts of a whole interact with each other to produce overall outcomes in complex systems. Students must effectively analyze and interpret information and draw conclusions, and reflect critically on learning experiences

and processes. The 21st century skills of collaboration and communication are often coupled with critical thinking and problem solving, and require students to communicate thoughts and ideas articulately using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills. Along with global awareness, all skills require effective listening and communication in diverse environments and teams. Students must assume shared responsibility, show flexibility, and compromise in order to accomplish goals. The need for today's students to develop skills in the realms of critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving has increased because most workers now face workplace demands for such types of skills only confronted by a small portion of the workforce twenty years ago (Newmann, 2000). The use of such skills is evident throughout every vignette provided in Chapter Four whenever students were working together during the simulation.

21st century academic knowledge. In order to determine the ways that the AmeriTowne program supported the development and use of 21st century knowledge, we can look at the types of activities the students were undertaking. To review, 21st century knowledge refers to the subject material that enhances traditional academic content (P21, 2006). While P21 recognizes other facets, namely global awareness, environmental, informational, media, and technological literacies, the 21st century knowledge included in the focus of this research study were: health and wellness education, as well as civic, financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacies. It is evident in Chapter Four that the AmeriTowne program addressed and supported all of these concepts to varying degrees.

Health literacy. Health Literacy is defined as students having the ability to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and use such information and services in ways that enhance health (P21, 2009). It includes students having an understanding of preventative physical and mental health measures including proper diet, nutrition, exercise, and risk avoidance. Health and wellness literacy was supported during the simulation because of the Medical Center and the role it played. While not all students received the same amount of health information, all students were exposed some health literacy related topics. For example, every student working in AmeriTowne applied for health insurance through their business, filling out a health related questionnaire which was delivered to the Medical Center for processing during the simulation, as can be seen in Chapter Four in the vignette *Whose Towne Is It?* Additionally, in this vignette, each shop received a health and wellness tip, often related to the type of industry the business represented in the Towne. For example, Blue Sky U received: Always wear your bike helmet when riding your bike even on campus. Health information was also provided to some students who were selected because of their job position and subsequently picked up by the Towne's ambulance and required them to see the physician before returning to work. During these visits, the Towne's physicians diagnosed, relayed a treatment plan, and reviewed what types of preventative measures or lifestyle changes would counteract or keep the illness from occurring. Several examples of this can be seen in Chapter Four's vignette, *Can We Fix You? Yes We Can!*

Civic literacy. Part of 21st century readiness for students includes having general knowledge about civic concepts and includes students participating effectively in civic

life through being informed of and understanding governmental processes. Additionally, it stresses that civic involvement includes exercising rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national and global levels. The way that AmeriTowne supported civic literacy for fifth graders was through lessons about local, state, and national government, and by involving students in the creation of laws for their day in Towne, as well as giving them exposure to voting and electing Towne officials. Students conceived of the laws, proposed them to classmates, determined the fairness of proposed laws, and ultimately voted on items that became laws to be enforced by members of Towne Hall during the simulation. Additionally, students ran for judge and mayor. Primary elections were held at school prior to the Day in Towne, and all students were required to work on at least one candidate's campaign prior to the general election. The General Election also occurred at school during the pre-Towne curriculum sequence, and those elected became the Towne's leaders (judge and mayor) for the simulation. Chapter Four's *Each of Us Has Our Own Role, and Each Role is Important*, showed elected officials being sworn in during the opening ceremony, and also portrayed the mayor giving his speech. During the simulation, students had access to, and were able to communicate with civic leaders. Additionally, in Chapter Four's *Your Honor We've Got a Runner*, some of the ways that the simulation gave students exposure to the judicial process is detailed.

Financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacies. Clearly a major emphasis of the AmeriTowne program in general, and of the Day in Towne simulation in particular, is the focus on financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacies. These involve students knowing how to make personal economic choices, understanding

the role of the economy in society, and using entrepreneurial skills to enhance workplace productivity and career options (P21, 2006). From its inception, financial, economic, and business elements of the program were placed with the intention that they would provide a support to the bank. The YACFE's mission of "To further the economic education of young people so they will be competent and knowledgeable in managing their financial affairs and may prosper in the free enterprise system" is a clear indicator of the emphasis placed on these concepts. A great number of examples, as detailed in Chapter Four, show students using financial skills such as check writing and recording money spent in check registers, using debit cards and keeping track of these expenditures, as well as completing cash transactions. Students were exposed to the financial elements of both personal and business expenditures, and the children were able to track spending and view financial records generated during the simulation for both the businesses they work for, as well as for their personal bank accounts. Students learned about what it means to be overdrawn, and all students also paid a service fee for having an account at the Towne's bank, tracking this fee within their bank registers. Another way that financial skills were supported during the program was that students were required to place a portion of their salary into savings, and were also asked to invest in either: a certificate of deposit, a mutual fund, or stocks. Students then received data about how their investment fared based off the final results of the simulation once all businesses closed at the end of the day. They were also able to visit students working in the Investment Center and make a change to their own investment during their day in Towne if they choose to, as Colleen reminded them in Chapter Four's *Whose Towne is It?*

The AmeriTowne program heavily supported economic concepts during the Day in Towne simulation. Students responded to supply and demand and often determined that they should change their prices based off this concept. Chapter Four's vignette, *Whose Towne Is It?*, showed Colleen reminding students of the role they will play in determining this when she tells them, "Remember you are the 'adults' here today, so if you decide you want to lower your prices, that's your choice, and even if we [teachers and staff] know you might not make a profit, we're not going to stop you." While students are given a suggested starting price for their products, ultimately they were responsible for the raising of, or lowering of the prices based on the supply and demand model. The vignette, *Can We Fix You? Yes We Can!*, shows how students made the decision to raise the price of necklaces based off the fact that they had sold most of them, while students in the Snack Shop had decided to price products individually at one price and choose to have multiple products purchased together receive a different (and lower) price. The simulation authentically portrays how both goods and services comprise an economy through the variety of shops represented in the Towne. Another element of AmeriTowne that supports economic literacy comes from a State of the Towne speech the mayor gives to his fellow students during the post simulation curriculum once students have received the final financial statements for the Towne's businesses.

Business Literacy is supported at AmeriTowne because all students must work within a business. Many of the tasks that support business literacy can be seen in Chapter Four's vignette *Whose Towne Is It?* Included in this were such things as businesses applying to Towne Hall for their business license, applying to the bank for the business

loan, and the posting of business goals the students generated during their staff meetings before coming to the simulation. AmeriTowne strives to mirror job and business skills that students will encounter later in life. For example, students applied to, and interviewed for, their jobs prior to the simulation and job placement decisions were based in part off of skills they possessed. For instance, one requisite for AmeriTowne accountants is that they have strong math skills. As in real life, students were able to see that businesses have several levels of employees such as management and other members of the workforce, and at AmeriTowne students working in management positions along with accountants received a higher salary than the remainder of the workforce. This was due to the fact that these positions required additional responsibilities, as is often the case in the work world. Chapter Four shows managers having additional responsibilities, as often the managers were seen problem solving for their businesses such as in *Can We Fix You? Yes We Can!* when the manager requested to his employee that the store take back the faulty flashlight and then determined that his employee should see the warehouse for a replacement.

An example of students demonstrating entrepreneurial skills can be found in *We Want A Refund!* when students in the print shop decided to expand the traditional product line of personal poster signs and disappearing ink to also include the sale of Mother's Day cards because of the upcoming holiday. While students were not explicitly asked to find ways to incorporate entrepreneurship during their time in Towne, all students did receive lessons during the school-based portion that discussed this topic as part of the free enterprise system.

Life and career skills: 21st century interpersonal and intrapersonal

competencies. Life and career skills are part of the 21st century competencies outlined by P21 (2006). These skills refer to behaviors and attitudes demonstrated by students that are believed to be increasingly important to students' future success. P21 assigns such skills as: creativity, innovation, communication, collaboration, problem solving and critical thinking, as previously addressed above, to the 21st century life and career competencies. Flexibility/adaptability, initiative/self-direction, social skills, productivity/accountability, and leadership/responsibility are additional 21st century competencies, outlined by P21 to be included in the life and career skills realm. The following examples from Chapter Four demonstrate how AmeriTowne supports the development and use of such skills.

Flexibility and adaptability is one of the life and career skills strongly supported by AmeriTowne. As seen in many of the descriptions in Chapter Four, students adapted to varied roles, job responsibilities, and schedules. The Day in Towne simulation created a climate of ambiguity where students must work effectively together, change priorities at times and remain flexible to changing demands placed upon them. Additionally, students are often shown dealing with setbacks, such as when only two students were working in the Snack Shop and one was required to go in the ambulance, leaving only the one female employee to run a crowded shop. Additionally, it is important for students to be able to understand, negotiate and balance diverse perspectives to reach workable solutions.

Jimmy brought up a good point about this when he said,

There was one day that I saw some kids who had this great idea of something they wanted to do, but they literally could not bring it to fruition because they could

not figure out how they were going to mesh together their personalities. The manager did not know how to make it happen so they couldn't get rubber to the pavement, so to speak. (Personal Communication, August 6, 2013)

AmeriTowne empowers students to work together, but also allows enough autonomy so that students do not necessarily always know just how to do this, or at times students are simply not able to do so. We see an example of this when Jimmy intervened with students working at the Newspaper to help them solve the problems they were having with a missed break in *A View From the Greene*.

Additionally, AmeriTowne supports the 21st century skills of initiative, self-direction, productivity, and accountability. Students are encouraged to be autonomous, both as individuals, as well as working autonomously as a group with little intervention from adults. Students can be seen setting goals, balancing short-term and long term work toward these goals, and learning to utilize time effectively and efficiently. In every vignette in Chapter Four, the students monitored, defined, prioritized, and completed tasks without direct oversight from adults. This gave children a chance to go beyond basic mastery of skills to explore and expand learning, and as previously stated, they often reflected on past experiences in order to inform their activities during the time in Towne. Students can be seen conducting themselves in both respectable and professional manners. Several of the vignettes featured students referring to each other as "sir", "ma'am", or "officer", and students frequently spoke to each other in formal ways saying things such as, "You most certainly may" or "Please have a nice day." Finally, students showed productivity and accountability during the simulation, as they can be seen

managing their time, multi-tasking, and participating actively in order reach one intended goal of earning a profit for their business.

Conclusively, AmeriTowne allows students to develop and practice leadership and responsibility. Chapter Four describes several examples of ways students use interpersonal and problem solving skills to influence and guide others toward a goal. The mayor's speech in *Each of Us Has Our Own Role* and *Each Role is Important*, showed him using his leadership role to positively inspire the citizens of the Towne prior to its opening. Managers and business leaders leveraged strengths of others to accomplish common goals within each of the shops. Lastly, leaders encouraged others to act responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, such as in *Whose Towne Is It*, when the bank president and his staff intended to donate a portion of their profit to the Ronald McDonald House charity. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills stresses the importance of 21st Century knowledge and skills for students' future saying:

Students need specific knowledge in core subjects as well as an understanding of such 21st century themes such as global awareness; financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; health literacy; and environmental literacy. Education must go beyond the three R's of yesterday to encompass a range of skills that will help students function as productive citizens who are health conscious, appreciative of the arts, and aware of the importance of good manners and skills. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012)

Support for the learning. Another way to demonstrate the ways in which the AmeriTowne program helps to develop 21st century knowledge and skills is through looking at the ways that learning is being supported during the simulation. Simulations require participants to apply their cognitive and meta-cognitive capabilities in the execution of a particular role. Thus, an important advantage of simulations from the

perspective of learning is that they provide opportunities for students to solve ill-defined problems. Specifically, ill-defined problems are those in which, either the givens, the desired goal, or the allowable operators (steps) are not immediately clear (Mayer & Wittrock, 1996). These types of problems are important for students to encounter, because as Gredler (2004) states, “Although most educational materials address discrete well-defined problems, most problems in the real world are ill-defined.” (p. 573). When thinking toward the way that students will be asked to use knowledge and skill in their postsecondary lives, such as in college and careers, the AmeriTowne simulation—with its open-ended nature supports similar goals—allows students the opportunity to experience the realistic way that knowledge, skills, and thinking will be used. The interactions between the students and the ways they were using knowledge and skills were authentic, often spontaneous, and the simulation mimicked real life because it was not entirely predictable for students.

Question #4: What is the educational importance for those involved in the AmeriTowne program?

This research question focused on the received curriculum or the benefits students gained from the AmeriTowne program and participation in the Day in Towne simulation. I determined that AmeriTowne provides participants with opportunities to develop and apply a significant amount of academic knowledge and skills, in addition to supporting learning and skills development by providing opportunities for social interaction and situated learning, in an authentic experiential context.

Academic knowledge and skills. As seen above in research Questions Two and Three, AmeriTowne supports traditional academic content and skills, as well as 21st century knowledge and skills. Traditional academic content such as mathematics, reading, and writing are supported and integrated into students' day in Towne, and applied skills such as speaking, listening, and viewing are also a necessary component for students during the simulation. Complimenting traditional subject material, are 21st century knowledge categories such as: health, civics, financial, economic and business concepts. 21st century skills are also abundant: creativity, innovation, communication, collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, productivity, and accountability, which are all fostered through the AmeriTowne program. While not stated in AmeriTowne's intentions, I determined that AmeriTowne builds understanding across core subjects as well as exposing students to 21st century topics. The emphasis at AmeriTowne shifted from shallow knowledge to development of deeper understanding, and engaged students with real world subject knowledge, tools and expert information such as that they may encounter in college, the workforce and post-secondary life. AmeriTowne supports the idea that students learn best when actively engaged with using academic knowledge and skills to solve meaningful problems and used such knowledge and skills in relevant situations.

Social interaction. As seen in many of the examples above in research Questions Two and Three, one way learning was supported for students were through the immense amount of opportunities for social interaction students were given during the simulation. One of the main ways that students interacted often involved students engaging in role-

playing. Role-play is heralded as a method of securing important learning skills and attitudes and has been viewed as a tool in achieving critical thinking, and promoting risk taking (Waters, Woods & Noel, 1992). Critical thinking is one of the 21st century skills advocated for by P21, and risk-taking matches as one of the intentions sought by members of the AmeriTowne staff. In addition to engaging in role-play, Chapter Four depicts students continually communicating, collaborating, cooperating, and interacting with one another. Learning was not done in isolation instead social learning was encouraged. This supports Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2008) idea that collaboration between students increases learning, motivation, and creates better and more innovative results, and develops social skills.

Situated learning. AmeriTowne supports situated learning as it engages students in tasks that parallel real-world application within the Day in Towne simulation. Because the students involved are too young to actually participate in the real-world applications, i.e. they are too young to actually hold jobs, the simulation was important because it gave them the opportunity to experience what it might be like to take part in such activities, and supported a similar form of learning for the community of students involved.

Norman (1993) states:

Simulated experiences have the potential to become powerful instruments of cognition. They support both experiential and reflective processes: experiential because one can simply sit back and experience the sights, sounds and motion; reflective because simulations make possible experimentation with and study of actions that would be too dangerous or expensive to try in real life. (p. 205)

AmeriTowne supports situated learning by providing a learning situation that emphasizes social interactions and authentic practice, allowing students to learn associated facts,

knowledge and skills because they need to know these things to accomplish the task they have been given within the simulation.

Within the simulation, another aspect of situated learning supported, involved students demonstrating elements of cognitive apprenticeship (Collins, 1991). This apprenticeship took place in the form of the modeling of processes, the modeling of performance, and had students making visible parts of the process not always seen in order to help others with learning. Most frequently, this took place through what Duffy et al. (2004) term “articulation” which is essentially the making of tacit knowledge explicit, of which we saw examples provided in the discussion of research question two above. Cognitive apprenticeship maximizes learning because it captures the essence of the role of learning in real-life situations, where there is often no teacher serving as the giver of information, rather others (pairs, groups, work units, networks) who may also be learning simultaneously and where knowledge is shared and distributed (Jones, Rasmussen, and Moffitt, 1997).

Additionally, AmeriTowne supports Resnick’s (1987) ideas of the importance of situated learning through three important points: learning for economic preparation in life, supporting lifelong learning structures, and learning that supports preparation for civic and cultural participation in the social world. She reminds us that schools should focus on developing reasoning and reflection using shared knowledge so that students may be better prepared to take their place in both the social and the work world, opining that successful educational programs include three elements of situated learning: socially shared activities, apprentice-like structures, and course content designed to include

student participation and meaning-making. We can see from the descriptions provided in Chapter Four, that AmeriTowne bolsters similar ideals.

Authentic context. Finally, another way that learning is supported by AmeriTowne is through the provision of authentic contexts. Authentic contexts are “conditions in which learning activities occur (the people, objects, symbols, and environment) and how they all work together to support learning” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 31). As described in Chapter Four, AmeriTowne has a specially created physical environment, as well as authentic roles, tools and an authentic goal (in this case, successfully running a town). All of these facets combine to create a setting where particular skills and knowledge can be applied, developed, and refined, thus, supplying a more authentic context for learning. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999) suggest that using authentic contexts increases the chance that information (skills, knowledge) will be able to be used in other similar situations. This would suggest that students need more real-world problem solving and authentic learning experiences to make learning more permanent and utilitarian and for young students. AmeriTowne provides this.

Question #5: How are AmeriTowne’s theories and practices applicable in K-12 classrooms across the nation?

This research question focused on AmeriTowne’s significance more broadly and considered how the findings of this study might contribute to the larger context of the American educational system. While the previously stated answers to this study’s research questions addressed the significance of the AmeriTowne program and its Day in Towne simulation, this study may also provide information for education in general. The

AmeriTowne program provides a unique environment and avenue for learning, one that contradicts what many schools currently provide. Additionally, with current educational trends increasingly moving toward supporting 21st century themes, experiential simulations offer a model for addressing this need.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2012) recommends that consideration be given to the creation of 21st century learning environments. According to P21, such environments would allow for appropriate learning practices, provide human support systems, and supply physical spaces that support the teaching and learning of 21st century knowledge and skills. These environments would enable students to learn in relevant contexts through project-based or applied work and ideally, would support expanded community involvement in learning. AmeriTowne provides such an environment.

Accepting the proposition that we learn by constructing new understandings of relationships and phenomena in our world makes accepting the present structure of schooling difficult. Educators must invite students to experience the world's richness, empower them to ask their own questions and seek their own answers, and challenge them to understand the world's complexities. (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p. 5)

The experiences of the children portrayed in Chapter Four illustrate that contextualization of learning through the use of an experiential simulation, coupled with constructivist practices provided a powerful model for the development and application of knowledge and skills. Marzano and Heflebower (2012) concur, asserting that students must be able to set personal goals and self-check for understanding. Additionally, they believe that students' ability to access tools and resources enhances understanding and advances the ability to use what they have learned in real-world contexts. Accordingly, they deem these skills vital to success in today's world where accessing information is

more important than the memorization of content. They find self-motivation and the teaching of how to learn (versus what to learn) and the connection of prior knowledge applied to solving authentic problems paramount to student learning.

It is critical for those involved in education to have a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which learning can be supported. This study suggests that experiential simulations offer one way to support students developing and using 21st century knowledge and skills to ready themselves for college, careers, and life.

Recommendations for AmeriTowne

While the AmeriTowne program's unique environment emphasizes contextualized learning, and provides numerous benefits to students as detailed through the response to the research questions addressed above, following Eisner's (1991, 2002) advice that an Educational Criticism should lead to the improvement of educational practice, I proffer several recommendations here that I believe may compliment the learning supported by the AmeriTowne program or that I believe might further enhance the experiences taking place during the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation. These suggestions generally fall within four main categories: procedural recommendations, support for authenticity, ideas related to personalization of experience, and future oriented connections.

Students who attend the AmeriTowne Day in Towne simulation do so only once however most schools participating in the program have been doing so for a number of years. Therefore, the majority of teachers know what will be expected of the children and understands what is required of them in order to be ready and have a successful Day in

Towne. Because of this, it is important that the time spent there is used to its greatest advantage. Therefore, procedural recommendations include changes to the introduction that students receive when they initially enter the Towne before it opens. Groups generally spend four hours on site, and while it is important that students have some direction before beginning the tasks that are part of the simulation itself, I noted that the introduction students received at onset was perhaps more lengthy than needed. Much of the information was a repeat of the work completed during the pre-visit curriculum. While some groups seemed to benefit from portions of this review, many others I observed did not and I believe that the time spent in review could have been better used for lengthening the time spent participating in the actual simulation. Additionally, the staff members used a portion of this introduction time to give information about each product that the shops would be selling. Again, while choice is an important aspect of the supply and demand model represented by the simulation, I believe that it would be more useful for the students themselves to report out these products during the opening ceremony. This could occur before the swearing in of the Towne officials, and might take the form of students from each shop performing a skit, creating a chant, or singing a jingle about the product. Students could create these during the set up period after their warehouse delivery has been received. During the Opening Ceremony, perhaps the manager could introduce himself or herself, along with the name the employees have given the shop for the day and then present the product or service as I have previously suggested, or even simply show and tell as the AmeriTowne staff members did. Either way, I believe students would benefit from taking part in this portion and time could be

streamlined by removing the initial meeting when students first arrive on site and having teachers inform their students, prior to arrival, that they will be using the instructional card to begin setting up their shops and then only gathering the children for the Opening Ceremony. Conversely, if a group was new to the program, or teachers did not believe they had been able to adequately prepare their students they could still be given the option of the staff conducting the introduction with the current practice.

In turning to how the AmeriTowne simulation may more authentically support learning, I noted a few areas that might be improved. During my observations, I noticed that students were limited in the amounts that they could raise or lower their prices due to the fact that they could only use even dollar amounts. While it is reasonable for the program to not want to provide the students with coins in addition to the AmeriTowne dollars used during the simulation, the debit cards would likely be able to accommodate alternative pricing. By using a greater variety of pricing, the computational aspect of balancing checkbooks would be more rigorous, but would more realistically portray what they will see in their own lives. The bills that shops pay via checks written by the accountants could also be changed to reflect the use of dollars and cents.

Another change that could enhance authenticity would be for the employees to use email for communication between shops, versus solely the mail service. The addition of one email related task to the day, possibly for the manager's position, would more realistically show the way that businesses communicate. During interviews with staff, several members shared that the following year students would be able to check their bank balances in real-time through the addition of machines similar to Automatic Tellers

where the students would be able to swipe their debit cards to view their balance. The addition of students' ability to view their balance during the simulation was something I had also noted, so I believe this will also aid in this authenticity realm.

In order to make the experience more personal for students, I believe it might be beneficial to add a shop of choice to the Towne. This would enhance the creative and entrepreneurial aspects of the program because my recommendation would be to allow students to make (or gather) their own product(s) at school prior to their visit, or decide their own service to provide for the Towne. This shop could be run out of a small kiosk or cart in the Towne Greene and could employ a few students. Each school group would decide what type of business they wanted to have, and decide what type of product or service would be beneficial and of interest to their fellow students.

Finally, a recommendation for future learning connected to the AmeriTowne experience would be to add a few lessons to the post-Towne curriculum that while optional, would address what students would need to do to create a school or classroom-based business in order to continue using the ideas and concepts they learned during the program, and might relate back to the business created for the Towne cart above. This lesson sequence would help students to decide on something useful to their classroom(s) or school community and would not necessarily need to utilize real dollars rather students could develop their own representative currency, or they could utilize the services of the Young American's Bank to create an account for the business. Lessons might address brainstorming products or services needed for their school, naming the business, marketing, and advertising the good/service in their school community, as well as some

lessons related to running the business. Young AmeriTowne partners with many companies that sponsor the program and perhaps individual members from these community partners might be willing to be a resource for this aspect of the program and donate time as a guest speaker for a class period for the schools interested in taking on the challenge of starting their own business.

The aforementioned recommendations were based off observations and document analysis conducted during this study, and while they would not drastically change the AmeriTowne program, I believe would benefit students' learning and enhance the experience provided by the Day in Towne simulation.

Further Research

This study investigated how the AmeriTowne program supports learning and incorporates 21st century knowledge and skills development for fifth graders through participation in an experiential simulation. This study focused on public school students running a full economy at AmeriTowne. Additional studies might consider looking at charter, private or homeschooled groups, or might consider viewing the simulation when using only a partial Towne set up. Another possibility for future studies might consider following one group of students as they progress through the coursework sequence at school, during the simulation, and into the post simulation aspects of the curriculum. Furthermore, it might be interesting to compare and contrast two groups' experiences with the AmeriTowne curriculum and program, again viewing distinct groups as they complete all three portions. This study applied a lens of 21st century knowledge and skills, but future studies might consider viewing the AmeriTowne program through

alternative lenses. Finally, studies might utilize more than one of the AmeriTowne sites, comparing and contrasting the experiences of students.

Final Thoughts

Today every student requires 21st century knowledge and skills to succeed in a post-secondary world whether they immediately enter the workforce or further their education. Educators must ensure that schools are providing what students need to be qualified for life in a rapidly changing world. As such, changes to instruction, particularly those focusing on constructivist practices, are vital to learning and skill development. The construction of meaning and not the reproduction of knowledge is paramount, as is the authentic use of such information, particularly when coupled with the interpersonal skills that our world requires.

Situated learning offers one way to interpret the ways students make meaning and utilize knowledge and skills. While experts in the field of education acknowledge that both content knowledge and skills are important to a student's education (Dede, 2007; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010), the question remains for many of our schools how they can best accomplish this goal. While discussion continues in educational realms as to the importance of 21st century readiness, it is clear that contextualized learning environments, such as AmeriTowne provide one possible avenue for young students to begin to develop the 21st century knowledge and skills that will ultimately be necessary for success in the post-secondary world.

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APPENDIX A

Letter to Administrators



Dear School Administrator,

Young American's Center collaborates with many outside entities and values the expertise offered by our community partners.

As you know, educational research adds knowledge to the field and helps to improve school and program improvement. We continually strive to make our programming the best it can be and value input we receive from school leaders, teachers, students and educational experts. To that end, this spring, a doctoral student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver will be on site conducting research on the Young AmeriTowne program.

She will be conducting qualitative observations regarding ways the Young AmeriTowne program supports the development of 21st Century Knowledge and Skills. While her presence will not alter any aspect of your students' day in Towne, we feel it is important for you, your teachers, students and parents to be aware of this addition to your visit. During her observations, she will NOT be using video, photographic or audio recording devices. She will not be interacting with students or adults, rather observing the overall setting and educational activities. She will be taking observational notes regarding the general practices and activities of the group. Pseudonyms will be used for all schools, teachers and students involved in this study and findings will be written in way that allows for complete anonymity for all participants in the Young AmeriTowne program.

This study has been approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for ethical practices. A copy of this approval will be available on site for public viewing for the duration of the study.

You are receiving this letter because your school is scheduled to visit on one of the days that the researcher has planned to be on site. Attached you will find a copy of a brief demographic survey to be included with this research study. While the completion of the survey is optional, information contained within it would be used to further analyze observational findings for the study.

We anticipate this experience to be positive for our program and the schools involved, however, if you have any objections to having your school's students be part of this study, please notify us here at the Young Americans Center and we will request that the researcher not be present during your school's visit.

We look forward to your visit to Young AmeriTowne!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. C."



Money Smarts for Kids. Money Skills for Life.

APPENDIX B

Optional Administrator Demographic Survey

School Name _____

Number of Students attending AmeriTowne

30-60 60-70 70-80 80-90 over 90

Number of identified English Language Learners attending AmeriTowne

0-10 10-20 20-30 30-40 40-50 50-60 over 60

Number of identified gifted students attending AmeriTowne

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 more than 31

Number of identified special education students attending AmeriTowne

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 more than 31

Number of years the school has participated in the AmeriTowne program

First year 2-5 years 6-9 years over 10 years

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for AmeriTowne Day in Towne Staff

1. What role do you play at the Young AmeriTowne (YA)?
2. What is your perspective of how content knowledge fits into a students' day here at YA?
3. What role do you see the Towne's physical environment playing in student learning?
4. How do you see student autonomy relating to a students' experience and learning during their day at YA?
5. What role do you see student to student interaction playing in the learning at YA?
6. What role (if any) do adults play in the students' learning and experience at YA?
 - When do you decide to intervene or instruct during the simulation?
 - Are there times when adult interaction impedes the process? (ie- volunteers, guests, teachers, yourself)
7. What do you see as the most beneficial aspect of learning provided to students via the YA program?
 - The most unique aspects?
 - Is there any part you believe is not beneficial?
8. What do you see makes certain school groups more successful at running the simulation effectively than others?
9. Are there elements of the YA program you feel need to be enhanced to benefit student learning? If so, what are they?

Is there anything else you are interested in sharing about your work or the program?

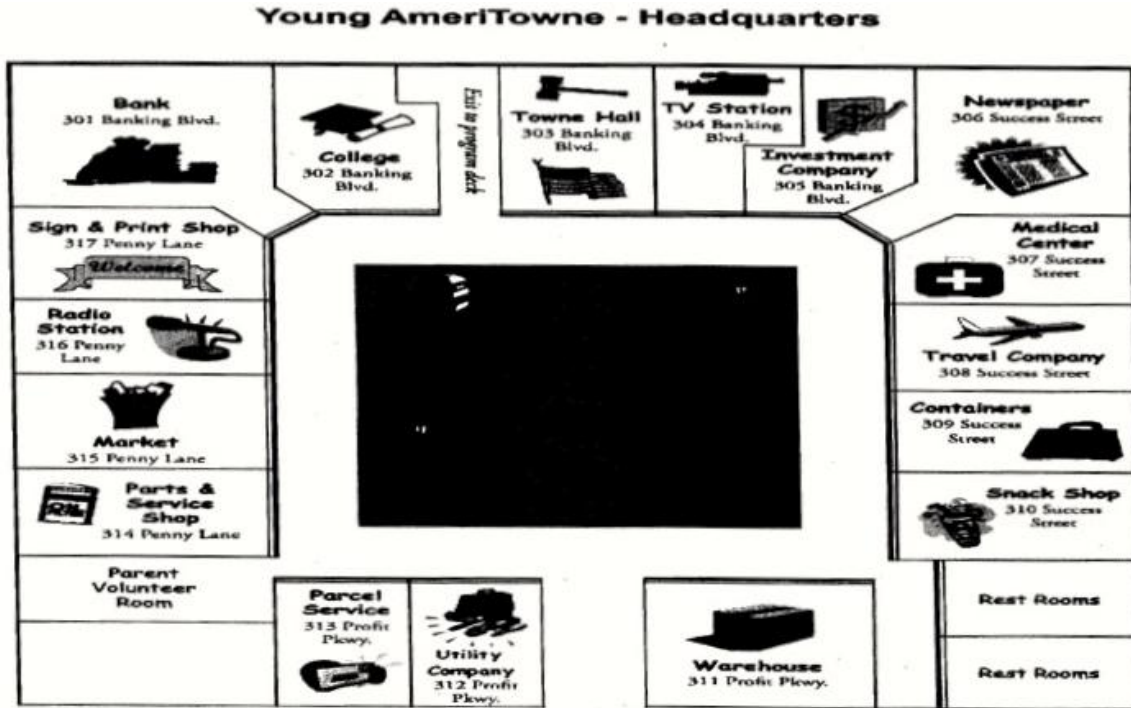
APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for the Vice President of Programming at the YACFE

1. How long have you worked with the AmeriTowne program and in what role(s)?
2. What do you know about the history of the AmeriTowne program? (i.e. why was it started or what were the educational intentions?)
3. Has the program changed over time? (i.e. have there been strategic changes or changes that occurred organically?) If yes, how?
4. What do you see are the major benefits to students that are provided by this program?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the program?

APPENDIX E

Map of the Young AmeriTowne Shop



APPENDIX F

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study that will examine how the Young AmeriTowne program supports 21st century skills in a contextualized learning environment. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of dissertation research for a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. The study is conducted by Alicia (AJ) McKinney. AJ McKinney can be reached at 720-254-8073 or emailed at amckinn8@du.edu. This project is advised by Dr. Maria del Carmen Salazar, Assistant Professor Curriculum Studies and Teaching, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208. Dr. Salazar can be reached at 303-871-3772 or by email at Maria.Salazar@du.edu.

Participation in this study should take about 60 minutes of your time. Participation will involve responding to questions about your work with the Young AmeriTowne program. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks involved with this study are minimal. However, if you experience discomfort with any part of the process or questioning you may discontinue the interview at any time. Additionally, I respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable.

You will be identified by pseudonym only. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, I am required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or you may email du-irb@du.edu, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs or call 303-871-4050 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called Young AmeriTowne reserach. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____ Date _____

___ I agree to be audiotaped.

___ I do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature _____ Date _____

_____ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address: